

# The Barnes Foundation

## Journal of the Art Department

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# THE BARNES FOUNDATION

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## Journal of the Art Department

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The essays, etc., appearing in the issues of this JOURNAL will, for the most part, be derived from the work of seminar students, alumni, and members of the staff of the Foundation Art Department. On occasion, articles and pieces will be published not directly concerned with the Foundation's philosophy but representing original work by the Art Department's students and outside contributors which the editorial staff considers to be of general interest to the JOURNAL's readers. Publication occurs twice a year.





Preparation for a Class Setup



# JOURNAL *of* THE ART DEPARTMENT

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## Creative Distortion\*

by VIOLETTE DE MAZIA†

### II. THE CASE OF THE LEVITATED PEAR

*My child: take heart, the fruit that undid man  
Brought out as well the best in Paul Cézanne.*

—John Updike.

OUR overall intent in the essays of this series is to designate the nature and demonstrate the rôle of distortion in aesthetic expression. In our introductory discussion,‡ we observed that distortion appears in all re-presentative effort, whether it be as simple an instance as a boy's imaginative response to a query of "What happened?" or a writer's encapsulating metaphor for a character in his story or as complex a one as Soutine's instrumental use of a chair in his "Baker Boy" (Plate 24). We found also that the justification for these distortions—or, more generally, the distinction between creative and non-creative departures from subject facts—lies in the nature of what they contribute to the identity of the work, the account, the story, the painting, in which they

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\* The material of this essay was originally presented in class lectures. The article is the second of a series on the general topic of Creative Distortion.

† Director of Education.

‡ See Violette de Mazia, "Creative Distortion," *The Barnes Foundation Journal of the Art Department*, Vol. III, No. 2, (Fall, 1972), The Barnes Foundation Press, Merion, Pa., pp. 7-21.



occur, a contribution which results from the artist's making instrumental use of his subject, as well as of all his other means, for the expression of his experience of some aspect of the world he encounters.

In the present essay, we shall develop our earlier findings by studying a particular work of art from the point of view of the relationship between distortion and the picture idea, trying to see what specifically happens to its subject and why (for something is always bound to happen) that happening is justified from the aesthetic point of view. Our example will be a painting by Cézanne, "Peaches and Pears" (Plate 11),\* in which what happened to the subject is likely to shock the viewer for creating a situation impossible from a naturalistic standpoint—the green pear lying down and the cloth at the right having been set unsupported in space. Many a critic has seen, and no doubt will continue to see, such a positioning as a picture defect, and the public follows his lead by calling it "wrong," "bad," "crazy." The source of this condemnation stems, of course, from the viewers' failing to understand what an artist does: they confuse what he creates of new color happenings with the illustration of happenings according to the laws of nature or physics; they look for what would happen as a result of the pull of gravity on objects in such a position.

Needless to say, to demonstrate or to illustrate laws of physics is not the artist's job or intent or interest. Furthermore, what we shall find is that the absence of support from the physical standpoint of pear and cloth accomplishes a support of intrinsic interest for this Cézanne, which is, in fact, a color situation, not a situation of fruit on a table.

We grant at the outset that a real pear could not stay in the position indicated by Cézanne. Neither could a table exist with the parts of its upper edge dis-located as depicted in Cézanne's "Fruit and Tapestry" (Plate 10), nor could its pear stay in the position shown.† The broken continuity of the upper outline of the table in "Fruit and Tapestry" has

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\* For the reader's convenience in following this analysis, a loose reproduction of the painting has been inserted as Plate 11A.

† Nor could the pear at the right in Cézanne's "Fruit and Ginger Jar" (Plate 32) be balanced on the table, leaning as it is over what seems a "bottomless abyss."



more than once inspired the comment that Cézanne could not draw a straight line or that he suffered from defective vision—this despite the “regrets,” or repainted parts, visible along the questioned area at the right, which indicate that Cézanne was able to make of the table edge a continuous line and that he deliberately changed it for the sake of the drama and action of the composition.\* A similar distortion occurs in the table edge in Tintoretto’s “Two Prophets” (Plate 33), this time for giving the composition an added sweep, yet nobody finds fault with Tintoretto, nor with the numerous other old masters and primitives who also incorporate non-naturalistic elements in their work, for, in the eyes of the public, the work of such artists is sacrosanct.

The perspective of the table and its legs in “Fruit and Tapestry” is also branded “wrong,” again according to a physical law which, for no sensible reason, people decree an artist should follow. Yet, here, too, Cézanne had a purpose: the distorted perspective shows us the platform-like nature of the tabletop to a greater extent than the table more accurately rendered could, and this lends emphasis to the thumping fruit upon it.

Peculiarly illogical, too, is the fact that the people who are shocked by Cézanne’s distorted perspective are not disturbed by his use of a color band to rim his volumes. Indeed, this band is not even called distortion by those who condemn the perspective. Nor do they accept the rim because they understand it, but because it is familiar to them: they are used to seeing it from prehistoric cave drawings on, and they accept it in Cézanne without even being aware that it is just as impossible a feature from the naturalistic point of view as is the distorted perspective or the unsupported pear. And they are unaware, also, of the fact that the basic reason for one distortion is the same as for the other—namely, to infuse the subject, hence, the finished work, with the character of the artist’s vision.

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\* The use of the term “deliberate” in reference to an artist’s expression is always warranted, although it does not necessarily imply “conscious” deliberation, in the psychological meaning of that word. In the case of this particular distortion in the Cézanne, however, it is a fairly safe supposition that the artist was consciously aware of the compositional significance of his departure from the facts of the subject.



Now our specific problem is to find whether there is a justification for the levitated pear in Cézanne's "Peaches and Pears," *i.e.*, to see whether the distortion fulfills a function in the painting. In order to direct our discussion to this concern, let us apply what we know that a work of art is—a thing with its own character and identity, something new, unpredictable—to such an object as the eighteenth century American andiron shown in Plate 23, Figure 1. This object, with its ball-and-claw foot, its Greek-column-and-urn stem, causes no disturbance in the casual viewer, no criticism of its gross distortion. Although it is not likely that we should do so, yet we could ask what a Greek column has to do with a bird's claw—a thoroughly impossible situation from the naturalistic point of view. In addition, the ball-and-claw rendering of the foot is not necessary to the practical use of the object. Nevertheless, this incongruity is acceptable to most of those people who reject Cézanne's, thanks to the fact that they are able to allow an artificial, pigeonholing mentality to stand in for simple logic or intelligence. For, just as the part we have singled out in the andiron is not a claw but a constituent of the object, so the green unit in Cézanne's "Peaches and Pears" is not a pear but a constituent of his painted object.

While we have noted that the distortion of the claw foot plays no part in the utilitarian function of the object, we can also see that, because of that foot, the particular andiron has among other characteristics one of a graceful holding-on grip, in contrast, for instance, to the cling-to-the-floor feeling of the pad-footed andiron shown on Plate 23, Figure 3, and the elevated toe-dancer effect of another andiron illustrated on Plate 23, Figure 2.

In a similar manner, we might also look at Cézanne's rendering of a particular part of his picture to see what characteristics it imparts to the whole. To begin with, if we know that an artist is not a parrot or a monkey, *i.e.*, that he does not function as a recording machine or compete with a camera, that he is not a conceited craftsman, that he does not advertise the wares he uses as his subject, then we know also that his interest does not lie in re-producing things as we may know them and, further, that we should consider



such a unit as Cézanne's pear as one of the components of the new thing—his picture. As such, the pear is a color area, one of several color areas, and these color areas taken together make up a pattern of relatively well-defined shapes that, because of a number of factors, produce the illusion of solid, weighty volumes in three-dimensional space. Thus, the artist's point is not that the unit says fruit, but that it might say something new about what we know as fruit, something which is intrinsically interesting in terms of broad human qualities—a kind of weight, a kind of solidity, a kind of power, a kind of activity, a kind of balance, and so on.

Considering the pear unit in its context, we might note a few important aspects of the work as a whole that make it interesting as a picture, for the sake of which Cézanne did what he did to and with the pear, as well as to and with all the other constituents. For example, the units in general have been so distributed, organized and made to relate to and affect each other that there results a definite framework of three more or less parallel horizontal areas or bands: the lower one, the table front, dominated by yellow; the upper one, the background, by dark blue; and the center one by a multicolored mixture. Because of this the center is held in and set off by the simpler outer bands in what we might term a "sandwich" formation, a designation referring to the effect of an important center "filling" being held in by simple "slices."

The sandwich formation occurs in numerous things: in the human body, as the trunk is enframed by the arms; in pictures on a wall, as when a painting is hung between balancing canvases—and we respond to such a wall in a manner different from our way of responding to another type of hanging because the sandwich formation affects us in a special way. Compare, for example, the wall-hanging shown in Plate 37 or Plate 19 with the hanging in Teniers' painting of the Collection of the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm (Plate 8): the sandwich formation of the former two draws, focuses our attention on what is, in such a plan, the core, the main unit which leads most directly to the identity of the whole. It is a ham sandwich, a chicken sandwich; it is a "Titian" wall, an "El Greco" wall—although the wall would

not be what it is as a totality if other paintings than those specifically present were flanking the central one, as the ham sandwich on rye bread is not the same sandwich when toasted white bread is substituted.

So, too, in individual paintings, our response differs when we find a sandwich formation and when we find the painting spreading over the canvas area with no particular main point of interest, as, for instance, Klee's "Garden Signs" (Plate 14) and Léger's "The City" (Plate 13): the picture is open-ended at all sides, not contained, not what we might call "bound" as against "free." The sandwich composition is contained at least within two boundaries; the open one, as that of "Garden Signs" and "The City," leaves room for anything to happen in the sense that a piece can be cut from it or added on at any edge—thus being what Arthur B. Davies used to call a "continuous composition." Klee used the open composition quite often, sometimes countering it with an enframing color border. His work also provides an example of a variation on the sandwich type—a relatively empty sandwich, perhaps just buttered in the center, with the slices of bread being important for what they are, as, for example, raisin bread, and more substantial than what they hold (*e.g.*, Plate 34).<sup>\*</sup> We might say in passing that there is nothing to be held against the continuous or panoramic organization; all one can say is that it gives, or it yields, a different character, arouses a different response, as one responds differently, for instance, to a smorgasbord spread in contrast to a steak dinner.

In the field of painting, the three-banded sandwich framework is not new with Cézanne, nor is it infrequent in the traditions.<sup>†</sup> Cézanne often resorts to the sandwich—for example, in "Red Earth" (Plate 4) and "Nudes in Landscape" (Plate 2)—and it should be of interest to the student to find out the effect the framework helped him to accomplish in these paintings that he could not otherwise have. Apart from the specific effect he achieves in each canvas, Cézanne uses the sandwich in relation to his interest for what it can do in a general way—for stressing the positiveness, for

<sup>\*</sup> See also El Greco's "Annunciation" (Plate 27).

<sup>†</sup> Portraits in particular tend to utilize a sandwich formation, usually vertical.



emphasizing the main point of his picture statement. In other words, as an expressive means it serves to lead simply and directly to the meaty core of the picture idea, with little delay from interest-holding units along the way—much as the “soup approach” to a dinner prepares us simply for the main course and the light dessert helps us to relax after the substantial roast. The presentation of a thesis might also be patterned after the sandwich formation: a simple introduction leading to, preparing for, the main point, which thus gets its proper emphasis by being so introduced, followed by a less emphatic wrap-up of the presentation. Still, it should be kept in mind that at the dinner table or in the presentation of a thesis, as in a picture, the sandwich is only one way of going about it. There are a number of other procedures or plans, each with inherent possibilities that the others do not offer, but when successful they occur every time as a means to an end and not as an end in themselves.\*

By citing a few examples we can see how various are the effects possible with the single framework of three parallel bands when used instrumentally whether or not in sandwich formation. In Renoir’s “After the Bath” (Plate 30), of 1910, the three bands have a diagonal slant, not unlike those in Paolo Veronese’s “Baptism” (Plate 26) and Soutine’s “Seated Woman” (Plate 25), thus contributing a specific note of drama; in the Renoir all three bands are threaded together by the vertical and horizontal placement of the various constituents of the figure. In Renoir’s “Standing Odalisque” (Plate 29), of 1918, the three horizontal bands line up vertically as a backdrop to the figure and blend with each other by way of their overtones. In Delacroix’s “Killing the Dragon” (Plate 15) the two outer bands consti-

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\* We should not, incidentally, arrive at the mistaken conclusion that the presence of a sandwich formation is due to the fact that the subject was a portrait-figure, a still life or a landscape. Although it is true that a subject may, by its nature, lead to or suggest a sandwich, the subject does not determine or dictate what the picture is to be: in Titian’s “Man and Son” (Plate 31), in Cézanne’s “Fruit and Tapestry” (Plate 10) and “House and Wall” (Plate 9), in Van Gogh’s “Flowerpiece” (Plate 36), in Renoir’s “Red Boat, Argenteuil” (Plate 6), in Van Goyen’s “Dutch Waterways” (Plate 22) and many other Dutch paintings we find still-life as well as landscape subjects but no sandwich formation. Again, it might be of interest to the student to follow in each the effects that result from the fact that the sandwich formation was not utilized.

tute foreground areas at both the top and the bottom of the canvas which recede into the middle band in somewhat of a cone formation. In Cézanne's "Four Bathers" (Plate 18) the three bands line up as a sheetlike setting, with a pronounced drama of light and dark at the top and bottom, and are sewn together by the upright figures. Cézanne's "Five Nudes" (Plate 17) appears very much like the "Four Bathers," but here the three bands line up with limited drama of contrast into a slablike background that projects the figures forward. In Cézanne's "Red Earth" (Plate 4) the three bands are contrasted not only in color but also by way of the pattern of brushwork, which differs in each and which imparts added movement of directions. In Cézanne's "Gardanne" (Plate 1) the lower band is divided into two parts and, through this division, connects with the middle band, as does, in reverse, the band at the top; the three bands together combine into a large step formation, providing the keynote of the entire composition. In Glackens' "Dieppe" (Plate 5) the lower band projects in silhouette into and against the central band, thus setting off the illustrative character of the figures. In Van Gogh's "Nude" (Plate 16) the brushwork moves from the upper band to the lower, by way of the vertical striations, in a slow curvilinear movement, while the figure moves horizontally in the curvilinear theme. In Renoir's "Picnic" (Plate 3) the arrangement and relationships of the bands are not unlike those described in the above-mentioned Delacroix, but here the matter is one of a fluid iridescence and differentiates the resulting meanings. In Corot's "Woman in Pink Blouse" (Plate 28) there is an ingenious disposition of the three elements—the skirt of the woman, the dark shadow, the upper right background, with the dark shadow having its arm, so to speak, around the woman's waist as it reaches from the left background to the foreground at the right.

In Cézanne's "Peaches and Pears," the three bands of the sandwich are so related, so made to affect each other in three-dimensional space, that together they organize into a step formation—the "riser" of the table front, the "tread" of the tabletop, with its fruit, etc., and the background "riser." It is a step that moves upward and backward into space, with its tread sweeping across from right to left—an angular



sweep broken up in its movement backward, forward, upward, downward and across, not unlike a river between its banks that moves up and down over a rocky bed. Looking further, we note a self-enframing relationship, an interlocking of parts that achieves something quite specific by way of its serving to hold the horizontal sweep in and to contain the center from all sides, yet destroying neither the sandwich nor the horizontal sweep. This enframing element\* is made of the broad band which extends across the top of the canvas as the background area and is continued at a right angle down the right side, behind the levitated pear and cloth and along the vertical edge of the table leg; and a second such sequence, abutting the first at each extremity, which takes in the area of the table front from the edge of the table leg through the drawer and moves up the cloth at the far left to the point where it locks into the background band.

Within the horizontal sweep inherent in the step-formation aspect of this Cézanne we also can trace a set of ascending linear directions, both short and long, all tending towards a peak from various starting points along the base of what we perceive to be a pyramidal formation.† Furthermore, within the inclusive pyramidal formation one peak tends to pull to the right while the axis of another seems to pull away towards the left.‡ As we perceive one static unit in reference to the other static unit, tension and a sense of movement are created between the two. Were we to straighten the pyramids and make them parallel to each other, we would be killing an intrinsically dynamic activity for the sake of a well-behaving, but only make-believe, group of objects on a table.

We are still aiming towards the suspended pear and the reason for its support being withheld—that position as dis-

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\* See Diagram, Plate 38, Figure 2.

† A pyramid by its nature says "held within" and "safely on a broad base," with an emphasis on the compactness of what is thus held in. It also says stability: it is less easily dislodged than is a sphere or a cube, as we feel more stable standing with our feet apart than with our legs parallel to each other. Furthermore, a pyramidal formation says "stable-at-rest" rather than "caught-in-movement," as it is the natural formation assumed when falling sand or salt comes to a standstill. And thus we find the pyramid formation used by artists for that effect—the effect of stability.

‡ See Diagram, Plate 38, Figure 1.

comforting to the uninformed or the misinformed as it would be were it assumed by a real pear sitting thus on a table. To understand the space-table-pear relationship and the part it plays in this Cézanne we must grasp a bit more of the entire situation in which it participates: we must understand the overall strategy of the artist, and what that calls for, in order to follow and comprehend the tactics used to carry it out. In a game of chess, for example, we may admire the pattern of the chessmen at a certain moment in the game, but we would not criticize the player who alters the pattern in order to checkmate his adversary; we would not be that illogical. And we should not be so, either, in the case of a painting; that is, we should not decide on the rightness or lack of it of any part or aspect without considering that part or aspect in reference to the artist's overall intent, as so frequently happens among students and critics, who make a practice of deciding that a unit in a painting "doesn't work" without asking what it should work for.

In "Peaches and Pears" we readily detect that an outstanding feature that gives us a clue to Cézanne's intent is the tendency of the total grouping to pull to the left. The result is an appearance of its being decentered, lopsided, unbalanced, with an obvious drama in the contrast of the two halves. We may then ask if this disbalance is caused by there being a greater number of things on the left, a greater amount of aesthetic interest. We may not be sure. Yes, there is a larger number of fruit—five on the left as against only two on the right; there is also a greater emphasis on colorful color on the left (the reds and yellows of the peaches), as well as a greater emphasis on the weight, solidity, compactness of the units—all of which, therefore, contrast with the handling on the right. If our response stops at this point because we decide what should be and look only for that and do not find it, we shall feel frustrated for the same reason that people are frustrated by the suspended pear; we will quite likely condemn the picture on the basis of its being disbalanced. In fact, however, it is our observation that is disbalanced, for we are making a judgement after having seen only part of the case, only part of the evidence. And to make a judgement on such a basis



would be as absurd as, for example, finding fault with spelling the sound "pear" as p-a-i-r or p-a-r-e or *p-è-r-e* without first looking for the context or for a clue to the intent the sound is to serve.

Therefore, we shall look further in the Cézanne for a clue to the artist's aesthetic strategy, and we soon discover that the positive drama of disbalance is an essential feature of it—a disbalance that occurs nevertheless, as we shall see, within a well-balanced, coherent entity. What we find is basically a simple bilateral balancing of almost identical, or at least analogous, things, picture things, picture units—*i.e.*, not pieces of fruit but units of color, light, line, etc. There is the plane of a plate on the left with volumes on it, and there is, at the right, a platelike plane with volumes on it—these "plates" consisting of two rigidly circular, overlapping units set at a slight angle to each other, while at the top center a peak of foliage interlocks, consolidates them as by a hinged joint. The "plate" on the right has, also, its counterpart of volumes—the two pears and the folds of the cloth organizing around the central upright fruit. The plate at the left directs our attention to, and thus connects in perception with, the knob of the drawer, and the "plate" at the right does the same with the dark spot at the upper right in the background. The pear lying down at the right, green in color, balances the volume of the white cloth at the upper left, and in this balance the drama pulls us to the green of the pear at the right. At the same time, however, we are still pulled to the left by the interest in the thumping color volumes. If our perception is not paralyzed by the suspended pear, we shall find that on the right there weigh a more varied pull of shapes, a linear flow and a beat of light-dark punctuations. One of these dark punctuations, near the stem of the pear lying down, together with the dark punctuation in the fold of cloth beneath it, forms an angle, the apex of which is at the right. This counters the riverlike flow across and, with a similar angle pointing away from the left side of the plate at the left, emphasizes the pyramidal formation and establishes a diamond or cube enclosure as it sends our eye towards the projecting, knoblike, distorted area of the drawer to the right of the actual knob.

A square or a cube set upon one of its angles would, in general, make for a precarious equilibrium and might well have done so in "Peaches and Pears" were it not for the fact that Cézanne places triangular wedges at each corner of the canvas that stabilize the threatened composure: it is a dramatic situation, yet there is no aesthetic disaster. Moreover, a cube holds things within itself, as a cube can and a pyramid cannot, for the balance in a cube is established on all sides—up and down, right and left, etc.—with a further drama added by the abrupt changes in the rigid directions of the four sides, a drama that, for instance, an oval or circular formation holding things within itself cannot produce.

The cube or diamond framework occurs in the traditions perhaps as frequently as does the pyramid, each time composed of other subject units and other picture units and each time of interest if it is made to serve an intrinsically aesthetic purpose—just as an artist might use red, blue, a pear or a peach—*i.e.*, for a means to an aesthetic end.\* It occurs often in Cézanne, as does the pyramid, because it unifies a painting in a way which specifically helps to establish the kind of drama, directness and positiveness which Cézanne usually seeks to express.

At this juncture we can understand the aforementioned table front, purposively distorted to make another "knob," needed where it is, not to pull the drawer but to pull this picture construction off and, together with the actual knob, to underpin, so to speak, the peach above it. This is not unlike what the two vertical edges of the table leg on the right do in reference to the upright pear over it: here, again, is a balancing of right and left, with our interest kept alive, renewed, by the contrasts in color, weight, line and subject units. And it is the same principle—the balancing of equivalents—that we find applying to our levitated units: on the right half of the painting, relatively depleted of the color richness and the kind of solidity and weight presented on the

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\* Examples of paintings in which the cube formation is found include: Titian's "Man and Son" (Plate 31); Paolo Veronese's "Baptism" (Plate 26); Cézanne's "Fruit and Ginger Jar" (Plate 32) and "Mont Ste. Victoire and Road" (Plate 7); Soutine's "Seated Woman" (Plate 25).



left, we are given an additional component—*viz.*, the one provided by the interest created by the suspension of pear and cloth.

We do not ignore these suspended units, nor are we, in some generous mood, willing not to mind them or hold them against Cézanne; Cézanne definitely did not ignore their possible function in this picture. In order to understand more exactly how they do function, in order to change the status of the pear from that of a sore thumb to that of an effectively active factor needed for this picture, we should now consider the overall story of drama with balance.

Suspension or levitation, through the associations with our past experiences of this condition, creates a suspense, an expectancy, a waiting for something to happen, all of which belong to the category of those feelings and conditions we can enjoy for their own sake; *i.e.*, we enjoy them independently of what we may feel about what is forecast, such as a disaster to a pear, provided that the possible pleasure is not inhibited by other concerns. We would not, for example, enjoy these feelings or the situation if there were a threat to a pear we wished to eat or to a piece of precious china. It remains, nonetheless, that suspense is, within limits, gratifying *per se*.

If, however, suspense is prolonged beyond the point of saturation—that is, when we are kept up in the air without coming, or without coming soon enough, to the resolution—then the pleasant-in-itself expectation gives way to a non-pleasant-in-itself frustration, which kills rather than excites our interest. We can see this happening in the case of a puppy, who is so human in so many respects: pretend to throw a bone or a ball and he perks up, watches for it, tense in expectation of its dropping and his getting—all with a much greater alertness, a *qui vive* aliveness, than when the bone or ball is merely handed to him directly; but fool him a few times, pretending to throw without following through, and, not unlike a human being, he loses interest and looks elsewhere. The point to be derived from this is that disequilibrium which creates expectancy is not in itself pleasurable, for it means insecurity; but when brought into balance soon enough, the satisfaction obtained from the ultimate

balance is the more keenly felt because it was preceded by expectancy. The same phenomenon is operative in the appeal of watching a tightrope walker, a ballerina, a juggler: apart from the skill and other aspects we may enjoy, much of our pleasure and interest is due to the continually renewed sense of suspense elicited by their almost falling off or not making it or missing a catch and, then, their not falling off, their making it, their not missing the catch.

Thus, it is the balance of disbalance or the gratification of expectancy, of suspense, which we can enjoy and find of interest. The fun of acrobatics and of sports are further examples, and it is also much of the fun of life itself, as well as the basis of life's continuity. As John Dewey says, the live creature constantly falls out of adjustment with his environment and continues to live only as he is able to re-establish adequate adjustment or balance—mental, moral, physical, emotional, psychological. We can even see the principle demonstrated in so simple an instance as our being annoyed by a draft and our adjusting to this circumstance by shifting our chair. More broadly, we are, in a sense, continually kept in suspense as to what will happen tomorrow or in the course of the day. In another sort of example, the plot of a story or a play is, in its way, an unstable situation which nonetheless is brought to a particular balance or resolution; indeed, a well-knit plot or story holds our interest much because of its adequate combination of situations which create expectancy with situations which satisfy it, and our interest is kept alive as each event or statement or word creates suspense which is satisfied as a new state of expectancy arises, on to the overall equilibrium brought about by a denouement that assigns a place and function to each part.

An illustration of our response to suspense-satisfaction sequences occurs when we chance to arrive at a movie theater in the middle of the film and see the end first; if we even do bother to stay to see the beginning after that, then, while we may enjoy much, we shall lose the pleasure of being led on, expecting and getting, expecting and getting, to the end. Again, if we must leave before seeing a movie end, how frustrated we are. But if the film drags on and on,



with little or nothing that creates expectancy, it runs itself out at the start; our interest is not sustained, and we leave of our own accord, with no regrets. Legal procedure offers another instance: we hear evidence from one side against that of the other, become interested and tense with expectancy, and then the solution, more or less satisfactory, brought about by the judge's or jury's verdict brings the situation to equilibrium. In a comparable way, a musical composition sustains our interest in great part by what we might call the question-and-answer character of its related phrases: the motif keys us up, leads us to we cannot tell quite what, and satisfaction comes with what we call the answer. The opening phrases of Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" and of Stravinsky's introduction to "Firebird" are two pieces which rely in a pronounced degree on the element of expectancy, and we can note our reaction to each according to the different length each piece keeps us in that state: the Debussy resolves expectancy just in the nick of time; the Stravinsky tends to wear our interest out.\*

The principle of balance and disbalance can also be demonstrated with the hanging of pictures on a wall: if we hang what we consider a center picture and place another on one side of it, we will look for and expect to find on the other side one more or less similar, although with an interest of novelty; that is to say, the two flanking pictures should be equivalents. If, for instance, one side of a hanging with an El Greco as the center picture were occupied by a horizontally-shaped, high-key landscape by Cézanne, the other might show another landscape, perhaps one by Renoir, of a shape, size and degree of luminosity comparable to those of the Cézanne (see Plate 19). Were we, however, to remove either of those, we shall get a shock of disbalance (see Plate 20): it is the juggler who misses the ball and lets it, and us, down. Even if we were to refill the area with another picture, but of an entirely different type, for instance, a small, vertically-shaped, relatively dark Daumier figure-piece (see Plate 21), the disbalance would still exist, for we are not led

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\* In all fairness to Stravinsky, it should be said that his work is written to fulfill the requirements of a stage presentation rather than being purely orchestral or self-sufficient.

to expect, and get no satisfaction from, the Daumier and either landscape in such a relationship. A corresponding effect occurs when the contents of a single painting are dislocated for no legitimate picture reason, as is often the case in the work of Chagall. In Cézanne's "Peaches and Pears," on the other hand, what creates the dramatic situation of the suspension of the pear is also, as we have seen, part of what establishes equilibrium by an interesting balancing of equivalents, a balance enlivened by the dramatic elements of contrast and suspense.

We might notice still another purposive and functional distortion in the Cézanne—the space below the levitated pear and cloth which functions somewhat as a volume and which, together with the double-line boundary of the table leg, is analogous to the piece of cloth at the left hanging over the drawer and the right side of its banded edge. While this area under the levitated cloth functions as a volume, it still retains its character of space; and if we were to supply a more literal support for the cloth and pear, as by extending the table at the right, such as has been done in Plate 12, the composition would cease to be contained on the right, and we would miss the drama of the suspense as well as of the thrust from the lower right angle of the table to the upper left of the canvas countering the thrust in the opposite direction from the drawer knob over the peaches to the dark spot at the upper right in the background. These latter relationships help to locate the entire still life in three-dimensional space. The dark spot, incidentally, being part of the unfinished state of the painting, reveals Cézanne's recognition of a need for an accent there for the balance of his composition—giving us one more example of the artist's distortion, his creative use of what his subject was, for the sake of the identity of the object, his picture, *i.e.*, the record of his aesthetic experience in which a subject figured as part of the matter experienced.

There is one additional question our discussion of "Peaches and Pears" raises—a question, indeed, that has been thrown around since Picasso's work brought it up in about 1907: it concerns using a recognizable subject at all. If Cézanne paints a still life, why should he distort, or, if he paints an



organization of color units in specific spatial relationships, why should he use, why should he bother with, still-life things? This is the argument of the so-called abstract or non-objective painters. The answer is that in the case of an artist such as Cézanne the interest is neither in still life alone nor only in space relationships, but in the entire situation of the episode in the world that aroused his interest, with its possibilities of qualities that are what they are to an important extent because of what—the recognizable subject—they are embodied by.

At the same time, however, the units of a painting do not have specifically to portray particular objects—for example, fruit or table or cloth; one of Picasso's so-called abstract works (Plate 35), done in 1921, may lead us to read into it "mother and child," "Madonna," "an artist with his palette," and so on—it does not really matter, for the picture offers an interest in itself by its ingenious organization of color units that comes off as a coherent entity with a balance of equivalents and variety of color and shape. Incidentally, Picasso called it "The Fireplace."

It is true that there is a difference between a Picasso such as "The Fireplace" and our Cézanne in their respective fullness of content and their specific connection with what we know of interestingly organized units. Nevertheless, in both instances, either recognizable fruit or recognizable shapes of color have been given an aesthetic identity, an "itness"; in each we recognize the matter—units that say fruit, units that say color shapes—and we find its aesthetic character emerging from the artist's aesthetic experience and from his expression of that experience. It also depends upon his ability to borrow something from the world and to distort it for the sake of a unique picture meaning, *i.e.*, his ability to make it function in a context he created, as we might ourselves have constructively distorted, altered the normal function of a chair to suit our particular intent.\* Thus it is that a work of art at any level is not a counterfeit or a pre-

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\* See Violette de Mazia, *Ibid.*, pp. 15–17.

tense. Distorted as it is bound to be in terms of the natural, normal or original condition of its subject, it is a true social document that nothing else can replace.

The above demonstration with Cézanne's "Peaches and Pears" is intended to help the student to understand the rôle of distortion in the artist's work and the fact that its justification comes from what a picture conveys of intrinsic broad interest by the artist's use of his means—something which we have never seen elsewhere and could not possibly know without the artist's having shown us because it is new, unpredictable, unique, *his*, although it deals with, as it enriches, what we know in our way, even in our aesthetic way. And the point is that we should endeavor to see what the departure from subject facts achieves in and for a given work instead of allowing ourselves to be bumped by, arrested on, what it fails to do which, for reasons extraneous to the artist's intent, we wish or decide it should do.

In our next essay on the subject of Creative Distortion we shall discuss distortion as it qualifies work in portraiture.



# The Barnes Foundation and the Threat of Cultural Entropy\*

by GILBERT M. CANTOR, Esquire†

I HAVE tried, in preparing my observations on the above topic, to be brief. As you shall see, I have not succeeded. However, I am not alarmed. Although I know that “the mind will absorb only what the seat can endure,” I know also that those who have studied at The Barnes Foundation have highly developed capacities of endurance in that area. It is what we might call a “fundamental” principle of a Barnes education.

I believe that the Foundation in its fifty years (approximately thirty in Dr. Barnes’ lifetime and twenty since his death) has demonstrated that it can survive adversity. The more serious question, now that the Foundation’s work is gaining broader recognition, is whether it can survive respectability, or, to phrase the question more generally, whether the present conditions of our culture will foster or, destroy the vital content of the Foundation’s teaching.

The meaning of culture which is my primary concern in this discussion is the concept of culture found in the humanities, as distinguished from that found in anthropology and the other social sciences. This is the special sense of culture as it exists over and above its manifestation in any particular civilization. In other words, within any given civilization, or culture, there exists *culture*, which transcends that civilization. It is this element that is sought in the arts, religion and history—those activities which venture to rise above the civilization in which they occur in order that the meaning of that civilization, and, ultimately, the meaning of human existence itself, may be understood. They venture, too, to discern or to create ideas and values which are not relative to the culture in which they are realized—including, for example, the “universal human values” so ably discussed at The Barnes Foundation.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Excerpted from a talk given by the author.

† Alumnus of the Art Department of The Barnes Foundation.

There has grown up, in and around these pursuits, a philosophy of culture, and we should be aware of the place of the Foundation in the history of that philosophy.

However, before attempting to place the Foundation's work in the history of culture, and to assess its value as an anti-entropic force, we should pause to place this basic struggle—the struggle of culture against entropy or vulgarization—in a larger context.

For, ultimately, the Foundation and all it stands for must share the fate of our entire civilization. And our civilization is threatened today with a much broader range of devastation than the forces of vulgarization alone can provide.

Let us pause, then, to ask, what is the condition of American (or Western, as it is largely Americanized) civilization today? (Here, I speak of "civilization" in the anthropological sense, as it embraces all aspects of life in our society.)

I suggest that the state of our civilization can fairly be characterized in this way:

1. Philosophically, we are caught between two leading pessimisms. On the one hand, we have the behaviorists, captained by the enduring B. F. Skinner, who offers to lead us—in his words—"beyond freedom and dignity,"<sup>2</sup> to accomplish goals—whose, we are not sure—under the prodding of positive and negative reinforcements.

The primary alternative voice is that of Existentialism, holding that man is free—emerging, becoming and forming himself—though life is essentially absurd and meaningless.

Thus, in a gross oversimplification, we have the option of *purpose without freedom* or *freedom without purpose*.

2. America has become a menace to the other countries of the world, militarily and scientifically as well as culturally. We threaten all life on this planet, and there is no convincing evidence that we shall muster the will to control our destructive potential.

3. We have acquiesced in the substantial impairment of the freedom and dignity of our people through invasions of privacy and the overt trampling upon our basic constitutional freedoms.

4. Our society has become broadly and deeply corrupt, and the people have chosen not to know or care.



And, turning to the aspects which are cultural in the sense of the humanities:

5. Our language is in a state of decay—approaching the point where it may no longer be adequate to the needs of expression of educated persons.<sup>3</sup>

6. And the arts—the languages of art, let us say—are in no better state. Though we cannot stop to review the arts with particularity, suffice it to say, for example, that drama has descended to the drama of the absurd and the drama of cruelty, while painting is mainly limited to a language that is capable of conveying a very meager range of human values.

Others have said before that our civilization is in a state of decline. It is no less true for being a truism. I have endeavored here merely to sketch briefly the nature and extent of its debility.

This pessimistic view is subject, of course, to debate—like any other prediction. Time, as they say, will tell. And I daresay it will tell more quickly than we are accustomed to expect. For time has sped up. The leisurely ticktock of our childhood is no longer heard; the future rushes upon us like a great wave from the sea.

The future may come indeed like the blows of Fate which preceded the ancient Gods—a radical discontinuity for which there can be no adequate preparation. And who and what shall sink or float no one can say.

And yet, though I speak of Fate, there is a sense in which what we believe may affect the outcome. This is the sense specified by Sir Kenneth Clark, in his study entitled *Civilization*, when he says it is *lack of confidence*, more than anything else, that kills a civilization. And in his closing pages, he remarks, “One must concede that the future of civilization does not look very bright.”<sup>4</sup>

Let us return, then, to the philosophy of culture, having in mind those activities by which we seek to understand civilization and to arrive at ideas and values which transcend it.

In the Foundation's publications, there is considerable emphasis on the fortunate and creative relationship of Barnes and Dewey, particularly in the realm of educational

theory and method. But there is more than that to the Foundation and its teachings. The Foundation belongs to a particular tradition in the philosophy of culture with respect to the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

Western civilization, in its older and primary tradition, identifies knowledge and truth with that which is cognitive, logical and discursive. Thus art, religion and other forms of value experience have been regarded as noncognitive, *i.e.*, as expressive and presentational in nature. In that tradition, the sciences are thought of as being objective and the arts are thought of as being subjective, the expressions of man's innermost feelings. Science, mathematics and logic are deemed the keys to knowledge and truth.<sup>5</sup>

The pragmatists, on the other hand, also distinguish between cognitive and noncognitive experience, but they developed a theory of mind that allows them to view both science and art as meaningful forms of inquiry.<sup>6</sup> The Barnes Foundation, of course, exemplifies and also develops this view. And while what it teaches is related, in this sense, to John Dewey and William James, it is also related to the theories of Croce and R. G. Collingwood, whose philosophies presuppose that each form of man's cultural life constitutes a form of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

In this view, art is as much a type of knowledge and a form of truth as is science.<sup>8</sup> And these philosophies, in turn, are rooted in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel and of philosophical idealism in general.<sup>9</sup>

To develop this history in detail is a task larger than the present occasion permits. My purpose is only to identify this particular tradition in the philosophy of culture, to point out that the Foundation (as a cultural institution), like a work of art, has its roots in the tradition I have identified and is not a special aberration, is not a mole on the face of human knowledge.

It is important to recognize, however, that the Foundation has not merely adopted or taught this view; it has developed it to a degree and with a particularity that go beyond the philosophies in which it is rooted, *i.e.*, it represents a significant advance.

This development is found in the writings of Barnes, of



de Mazia, of Buermeyer, and, recently, of Homsey, as in her excellent article "Science and Art" in the Spring, 1971, issue of the *Journal of the Art Department*. What they have done is to explicate the kinds of knowledge that art involves and expresses, the precise means by which this expression is accomplished, the relationship of this to other forms of knowledge, and the absolute and relative significance of such knowledge for human life. They have brought to the cultural tradition in which they work a clarity and precision which make it more objective and utterly convincing, and their contributions to this tradition are means by which, in the words of Barnes and de Mazia, "[their] successors may carry further the work of discovery."<sup>10</sup>

And yet this tremendous accomplishment is shadowed by a subtle but powerful threat. This is the danger which I earlier identified as "cultural entropy." It may also be called "vulgarization," but I believe there is a special usefulness in the concept of entropy because of the analogy that is available in the physical universe.

There appear to be two opposing tendencies in the universe: one is creative, leading upward toward the integration, patterning and regulation of matter. This tendency characterizes living things. There are occasional backward steps, but generally the course of evolution has been upward toward higher levels of complexity. The opposing tendency, which characterizes the *lifeless* universe, is downward, toward a continually greater degree of disorganization, toward greater randomness and formlessness. Matter tends to be more chaotic and random; all other forms of energy tend to degenerate to the simplest one, heat. As the physicists say, *entropy increases*.<sup>11</sup>

I believe the same opposing tendencies can be observed in the history of culture: on the one hand, we have creativity, with the integration of materials of knowledge into more comprehensive and more significant formulations—as in relativity, psychoanalytic theory, and so on. And, on the other hand, we see a tendency of society to reduce the materials of such conceptions to lower and lower forms, approaching meaninglessness.

Thus we hear people say, "everything is relative," gener-

ally with no idea of the possible content of such a cliché or of the creative development which preceded it. And we all know the extent to which the concepts of Freud have been debased by and for popular consumption.

What, then, is the nature of this process—cultural entropy—and how does it come about?

We turn at this point to Dwight Macdonald—the Macdonald of the 1940's and 50's (I am not familiar with his more recent work).

Macdonald wrote two significant essays on the subject of culture. The one to which I shall allude is "A Theory of Mass Culture," published in *Diogenes* (Summer of '53). This was preceded by "A Theory of Popular Culture," which I mention because T. S. Eliot, in his 1948 Preface to his "Notes toward the Definition of Culture," states:

I have also profited by reading an article of Mr. Dwight Macdonald in *Politics* (New York) for February 1944, entitled 'A Theory of "Popular Culture" '; . . . Mr. Macdonald's theory strikes me as the best *alternative* to my own that I have seen.<sup>12</sup>

What is Macdonald's theory? I will now, because of the limited time available, reduce Macdonald's excellent essay, rich with illustrations, to this inadequate, but essential précis:

1. For over a century Western culture has really been two cultures—the traditional kind, which Macdonald calls "High Culture," and a manufactured "Mass Culture."

2. The distinctive mark of Mass Culture is that it is solely and directly an article for mass consumption, like chewing gum.

3. The historical basis of the growth of Mass Culture is well known. Political democracy and popular education broke down the upper-class monopoly of culture. Business enterprise found a profitable market in the cultural demands of the newly awakened masses, and the advance of technology made possible the cheap production of books, periodicals, pictures, music and furniture, as well as new media of mass manufacture and distribution—movies and television.



4. While Folk Art grew from below, a spontaneous expression of the people, shaped by themselves to suit their own needs, Mass Culture was imposed from above, fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen. Its audience are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying. "If one had no other data to go on," Macdonald wrote, "the nature of Mass Culture would reveal capitalism to be an exploitative class society, and not the harmonious commonwealth it is sometimes alleged to be. The same goes even more strongly for Soviet Communism and *its* special kind of Mass Culture."

5. A special problem in the United States is that the boundary between High Culture and Mass Culture is blurred. There seems to be a Gresham's Law in cultural as well as monetary circulation—the bad drives out the good, since it is more easily understood and enjoyed.

6. The objects of Mass Culture combine an *ease of consumption* (works of art are predigested for the spectator, sparing him the necessity for making his own responses) with an *ease of production* (because of its standardized nature). Mass Culture "threatens High Culture by its sheer pervasiveness, its brutal, overwhelming *quantity*."

7. What are the results of this?

(a) Mass Culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, says Macdonald, breaking down the old barriers of class, traditions and taste and dissolving all cultural distinctions. . . . It destroys all values, since value-judgments imply discrimination, whereas Mass Culture absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody.

(b) Our intelligentsia is remarkably small, weak and disintegrated. The future of High Culture is dark indeed.

More recently, Herbert Marcuse addressed himself to the conflict between High and Mass Culture and expressed the view that the game is already over—Mass Culture, he says, is the single and all-pervasive one.<sup>13</sup> I consider his burial of High Culture to be at least slightly premature (predictive rather than descriptive), but offer it without further comment.

There are theories or explanations of vulgarization other than Dwight Macdonald's. I happen to think Macdonald's

says it quite well enough. He concluded that the only defense against what he calls "the spreading ooze of Mass Culture" is "staying power."

There is, of course, the sound of snobbery in all of this, but it is not snobbery in fact. To value High Culture and denigrate Mass Culture is not to deny access to the former to any person or group of persons, individually or by status—provided they are willing to make the effort which Mass Culture is designed to relieve and, indeed, to discourage.

It behooves us, therefore, to ask, what is the "staying power" of The Barnes Foundation and its cultural contribution, before the elements of "color, light, line and space" emerge in popular song, and the Houston *Creatives* play soccer against the Toledo *Academics*? And what, if anything, can friends of The Barnes Foundation contribute to the Foundation's staying power?

The "staying power," or anti-entropic force, of The Barnes Foundation, which I judge to be considerable, appears to reside in these characteristics:

1. Its historical, structural and functional unity and consistency (in contrast with the diversity and diffusion of other institutions):

Whether you look at the Foundation's  
 endowment  
 its buildings and grounds  
 its objects of art  
 its historical development  
 the subject of its courses  
 its teaching method  
 its publications  
 or anything else—

it is "all of a piece" and is, therefore, less amenable to disintegration than institutions which are less unified as to development, structure, goals and methods.

2. Similarly, its limited size (physical size and population) and area of expressed concern (philosophy and appreciation of art) help in some degree to protect it from the broad cultural currents to which the major educational institutions are so vulnerable.

3. Its peculiar and continuing vitality gives it the develop-



mental tendency of living organisms rather than the proneness to entropy of the inorganic. When I speak of the Foundation's vitality, I have in mind the expansion of classes, the development of seminars, the rebirth of the *Journal*, as well as the persistent refusal of the Foundation to compromise in the interest of entertainment, its unwillingness to simplify that which is intrinsically difficult or complex or to reduce Man to an object which merely responds to positive and negative reinforcements.

4. And, last but not least, there is the collection itself, which exemplifies, above all, in the words of James Johnson Sweeney:

Barnes' love of life which helped him, through his enjoyment of painting, to bring together this monument—this symbol of creative enjoyment, which is The Albert C. Barnes Collection, with its crown of one hundred and eighty pictures by Renoir, in whose work Barnes was always able to find, and which he has passed on to all who are willing to make the effort to enjoy it, that quality in Renoir's work which he saw as "the spirit of perpetual youth in a garden of June loveliness."<sup>14</sup>

I believe it behooves those who would be supporters of The Barnes Foundation to put their personal energies behind the Foundation's anti-entropic resources, to defend and preserve it as one of the forces in our culture which are fundamentally inimical to Mass Culture and which are worthy of being preserved from Mass Culture's flowing lava.

How, precisely, can that be accomplished?

1. By having the patience and taking the pains, whenever and wherever the opportunity arises, to articulate the nature and meaning of the Foundation's work, in all its richness and complexity.

2. By persisting in our appreciation of the Foundation as we appreciate a work of art. It is in many respects analogous to a play—it is there to be read: from the Indenture of Trust to the books and the *Journal*; but it is fully realized only in the performance, and, as in the case of a work of art, the appreciation of it requires our active participation, which indeed does not end when the curtain comes down or our classes are finished; the work goes on within us.

3. By expressing the results of our learning and our appreciation in the way we live our lives: in our responses to the world around us; in our dealings with others; in our personal and cultural choices.

Let me conclude by mentioning that in Vienna, in 1936, my earliest culture-hero, whose name to this day I utter with uncluttered reverence, the German writer Thomas Mann, delivered a speech in honor of the eightieth birthday of Sigmund Freud. Mann entitled his address "Freud and The Future."<sup>15</sup>

In that speech, despite the looming dangers of which he was profoundly aware in 1936, Mann dared to imagine "a humanism of the future, which we dimly divine."<sup>16</sup>

He said, "It will be a humanism standing in a deeper relation to the powers of the lower world, the unconscious, the id: a relation bolder, freer, blither, productive of a riper art than any possible in our neurotic, fear-ridden, hate-ridden world."<sup>17</sup>

And he evoked the images, along with that of the venerable Freud, of Mann's own culture-hero, the peerless Goethe, and of "The grey-haired Faust, whose spirit urges him"

To shut the imperious sea from the shore away,  
Set narrower bounds to the broad water's waste.

Then open I to many millions space  
Where they may live, not safe-secure, but free  
And active. And such a busy swarming I would see  
Standing amid free folk on a free soil.

"The free folk," as Mann says "are the people of a future freed from fear and hate, and ripe for peace."<sup>18</sup>

And if we can dare today, still and again, to imagine such a humanism of the future, surely it will be in part illumined by that flame of human values that brightly burns in the works of art which Albert Barnes assembled in his unique Foundation, and in the noble spirit of that Foundation's work.

If we, in the meantime, choose to be, not the keeper precisely, but the guardians of that flame, let us guard it not only at the hearth, so to speak, in Merion: let us cherish and fan also the embers that glow in each of us.



## Notes

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4. Clark, Kenneth, *Civilization*, Harper and Row, (New York, 1969), p. 346.
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# Reflections on the Aesthetic Experience in Gastronomy\*

*by* MARCELLE and ERNEST PICK†

## Foreword

*by* ERNEST PICK

MY name is Ernest Pick, and I should also like to introduce to you my wife, Marcelle.

The title of this talk is “Reflections on the Aesthetic Experience in Gastronomy,” and it defines our intent quite closely, with the stress of our remarks being entirely upon the words “aesthetic experience.” The talk is, in the true sense of the word, the result of our joint effort. It does not reflect the isolated views of either one of us, but contains conclusions arrived at jointly after much deliberation and, sometimes, momentous arguments. I am happy to report that, although our relationship was often strained to the breaking point during this process of fusion of ideas, it has emerged from it triumphantly with a renewed sense of intellectual and emotional communion, which once more calls our attention to the wisdom of our teacher in encouraging married couples to participate as a unit in the activities of this Foundation.

But I shall dally no longer. The talk will be presented by my wife, and I shall be at your disposal to answer your questions and comments afterwards. Let me, then, yield the rostrum to the better half of our team, for it was she who contributed the most creative and significant elements to this talk.

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\* Originally presented as a talk to the Seminar of the Art Department.

† Members of the Seminar



## Reflections on the Aesthetic Experience in Gastronomy

by Marcelle Pick

The subject of this presentation is food. We ask your indulgence for choosing this subject so soon after the season of gargantuan feasts,\* when most of our bathroom scales are still showing the aftereffects of overindulgence and most of us are still suffering the pains of penitentiary dieting.

We will not bore you with a treatise on the physiology of nutrition, the technicalities of *haute cuisine*, or a traveler's gourmet guide. For our subject matter we have selected the meal as a sensuous, aesthetic, and creative experience, since these qualities are the topics of chief concern in our seminars. The ideas advanced in this talk represent our current thoughts on the matter. They have evolved from our lifelong interest in and enthusiasm for the preparation and consumption of food, modified and enriched by our studies at The Barnes Foundation.

Indeed, the term "sensuous" is appropriate to the experience of food more than to that of any other thing. For the purposes of this discussion, let us define sensuous as applying to that which is transmitted from the outside world to the individual by way of his five senses—touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight. And let us also define the term "aesthetic": it derives from the Greek verb "*aisthanesthai*," which means to perceive or to feel and, for our intent, describes the fact that we can enjoy the quality of a thing as we are experiencing it, here and now, because it is pleasurable or interesting or moving in itself, irrespective of any practical function or utility it may have.†

All aesthetic experience is predicated upon perception through one or more of the five senses. Visual arts, such as painting and photography, are experienced through perception by sight; music through perception by hearing;

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\* The talk was given early in January.

† See Violette de Mazia, "Aesthetic Quality," *The Barnes Foundation Journal of the Art Department*, Vol. II, No. 1, (Spring 1971), The Barnes Foundation Press, Merion, Pa., pp. 3 and 7.

theater, dance, and film by both combined; sculpture and architecture by a combination of sight and touch. The experience of food, on the other hand, necessitates the joint and concerted involvement of all the five senses. In today's jargon, we would call it a multimedia activity.

Let us now abandon this room and join the other guests at a little supper at the very moment when the cheese soufflé, a golden brown, voluminous yet airy, cheese-flavored creation, has just arrived in front of our host. Our eyes hardly have time to feast upon its puffy roundness, billowing and bursting out of its mold, before our nostrils are titillated by the delicate pungency of baked eggs, butter, and cheese. As the spoon breaks its surface, a soft sound, *p-h*, like a winged messenger, alerts and prepares us for the subtly caressing impact of the melting, frothy, light mélange on the taste buds and the tactile bodies in our mouth. Perception through all five senses has just taken place.

We shall now consider what it is that qualifies the preparation and consumption of a meal as an aesthetic experience. When a hospital dietician designs a menu, her primary intent is of a practical, functional nature: to produce a physiologically balanced, healthful, and palatable meal in response to the patient's bodily need. There may be a coexistent aesthetic experience gained from the sense of a job well done, the fittingness of means employed or the satisfaction of her effort leading to the patient's improvement. But all this is only secondary. The major stress lies in the practical action.

When a gourmet cook designs a meal, the primary intent is aesthetic. He or she, and hopefully those who consume it, will be chiefly concerned with such matters as an ordered sequence of courses; the presentation of dishes in a mutually enhancing array of harmonious or contrasting shapes, textures, and colors; the fittingness of the accompanying wines; and, finally, the impact of the aromas and flavors as they mix, blend, or juxtapose to open the way to a full aesthetic experience. As the lighting and the frame interest the viewer for what they do to the painting, so the company and the setting concern the participants for what they do to a meal. These are some of the elements which are inherent in a meal the primary interest of which is aesthetic.



The following is a somewhat abbreviated quotation from John Dewey's *Art As Experience*:\*

The word "esthetic" refers . . . to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. . . . It is Gusto, taste, . . . and as with cooking, overt skillful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer. . . .

These very illustrations, however, as well as the relation that exists in having an experience between doing and undergoing, indicate that the distinction between esthetic and artistic cannot be pressed so far as to become a separation.

Since we have discussed the aesthetic, we should now turn to the creative. Great cooking does not suddenly appear on the scene like a newly risen soufflé. It emerges through a slow process of evolution and refinement. As do the fine arts, cooking embodies such features as selection, unity and variety, design, composition, economy and fittingness of means, and illustration, decoration, and expression of broad human values. Using a background of cultural, national, and group traditions, the cook will, from available resources, construct his own version of the meal, reflecting his individual sensitivity and experience as these relate to the materials employed and, above all, to the people for whom it is intended. When successful, he will have created a work of art. To quote Mary Mullen from an article by Violette de Mazia, he will present to us "a fragment of life . . . enriched in meaning by the artist's insight, sensitivity, imagination, and creative spirit."†

But our time is running short. A small group of Barnes students, all actively interested in cuisine, have been hailed to gather for an evening of dining in June. The guests, aperitif in hand, are in the drawing room. The conversation turns to French cooking, that bright jewel of western civilization. We discover that it is the product of a long development. Although it is mainly the creation of a few great French chefs of the nineteenth and twentieth century,

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\* Minton, Balch & Company, N.Y., 1934, p. 47.

† Violette de Mazia, "What to Look for in Art," *Ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 2, (Autumn, 1970), p. 22.

it owes much to earlier eras as well—to the splendid cuisine of the châteaux of pre-revolutionary France and the Palazzi of Renaissance Italy, to the exotic, extravagant fare of imperial Rome, and, even before then, to the elegant cooking of ancient Greece. In the sophisticated world of the Greeks, moderation was regarded as the highest virtue, in eating as in all else. The Athenians held the civilized conviction that dinner was a time to relax and to restore the spirit as well as the body, and they made an art of dinner conversation—a feat that, centuries later, was to prove particularly attractive to the French. With the rise of Rome to the center of world power came dining on a grandiose scale. Much of the lavishness of Roman dining carried over into the Middle Ages, enriched in France by traditional Gaulish fare. The Frankish conquerors had little to add to the Gallo-Roman cuisine, but accepted it readily and distinguished themselves by the prodigious quantities they consumed. By the time of Charlemagne, feasting had acquired a touch of elegance. Banquet halls were decked with flowers and ivy, but the fare was monotonous and repetitive, distinguished only by its pungent spices, which were used to conceal the flavor of the meats rather than to enhance it.

A typical dish of this period was stuffed dormice, and here is the recipe for you to enjoy. Prepare the stuffing as follows: take the meat of a dormouse, cut it into small pieces and mix with ground pepper, cumin, and ground nuts. Fill your dormice with this stuffing and after sewing them up put them in the oven. Dormice can also be stewed.

The break with these strongly spiced dishes and repetitive menus of the late Middle Ages came with the Renaissance, and here, as with the other arts, Italy led the way. The spirit of imperial Roman cuisine was revived without its excesses; the foods were more subtle. Renaissance Italians enjoyed truffles, artichokes, and *turnedos*.\* They no longer piled the food on their plate in the voracious manner of medieval men. And it remained for a slip of a girl to make the impact of Italy truly felt in France. Catherine de' Medici, great granddaughter of Lorenzo the Magnificent, married

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\* Fillets of beef cut from the tenderloin.



Henry II, king of France, in the mid-sixteenth century. She brought the ladies to the table and taught the French nobles to savor such delicacies as sweetbreads, truffles, *tournedos*, artichoke hearts, and *quenelles*.\* From then on, the age of culinary enlightenment continued until this day, slowed periodically by wars, revolutions, and depressions, but always emerging with increased variety and refinement. The growth of French cuisine was punctuated by the creative genius of chefs like Vatel in the seventeenth century, Carême in the eighteenth, Escoffier in the nineteenth, and Verdon and Soulé in our own time, all of whom brought to cooking the French talent for organization. They developed the cardinal principles of today's fine cooking, also stressing the appropriateness of means and the compatibility of textures and flavors. It is in this tradition that our cook of tonight went to market, not with a list, but with his eyes open and his hands touching the produce, selecting, rejecting, and organizing, all at the same time, in response to the stimulus perceived, and creating the composition of the menu which we are about to experience.†

Our host leads us to the dining room. The table is impeccably set with lustrous white damask, brilliant crystal, and gleaming silver, the clarity and sparkle of which are enhanced by the simple elegance of a low centerpiece of soft pink roses

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\* A sort of dumpling, light and delicately seasoned, made of pounded and finely chopped meat, fish, or crustaceans.

#### † MENU

*Consommé Célestine*

\* \* \*

*Saumon poché froid*

*Sauce concombre*

\* \* \*

*Rôti d'Agneau Printannier*

*Tomates farcies provençales*

*Flageolets au beurre*

\* \* \*

*Fromages assortis*

\* \* \*

*Vacherin aux Fraises*

*Riesling d'Alsace*

*Riquewihr 1967*

*Vin de Bourgogne*

*Richebourg 1961*

*Champagne Roederer*

*Extra Dry 1959*

\* \* \* \* \*

and silver-grey artemisia. We are seated around the table. The warm glow of candlelight imparts a jewel-like quality to our faces.

The meal begins with a clear consommé Célestine. The richness of its concentrated meaty flavor and limpid mellow-ness, gently contrasted by the vivacity of fresh dill and tarragon, surprises and delights us by its supremely delicate, held-in texture. Its amber translucency is deepened by the interplay of juliennes of crepes in the opaque white china bowl. These elements, like the overture in an opera, preface and herald the style and design of the courses to come.

Our glasses are being filled with the first wine. It is a white Riesling from Alsace. The slim, tall shape of the bottle evokes the soaring spires and arches of the Gothic cathedrals of western Europe. A sniff and a sip reveal a fragrance of exquisite complexity and a flavor of ephemeral grace, delicate but not flimsy, akin in its own manner to the visual quality of the stone lacework of the Gothic cathedral walls. The communion of transferred values and sensuous delight turns the conversation to the subject of western European civilization and its interlocking, unifying, even though diverse, traditions.

Before the remarks become ponderous, they are arrested by the presentation of the second course. The cold poached salmon, its silver skin stripped along the side to reveal the delicate pink flesh, lies on a silver bed, lazily surveying its court of glistening cucumber slices, voluminous egg halves, and bright, wispy twigs of watercress with the luster of its truffle eye. Its pink-and-silver theme echoes that of the rose centerpiece. Our weighty Merovingian monarch is soon dismembered and served with a cucumber sauce, pale green and thick, the marrowy tang of cucumber smoothed by the blandness of cream so gentle in texture and flavor that it does not overpower the fish. The flesh of the salmon, with its delicate nutty flavor, is tender and moist. The subtle, flowing harmony of flavors of fish, sauce, and wine on our palate rivals the gentle array of pastel colors on the table.

The selection of ingredients and the composition of this course are designed to reveal the essential qualities of "fish-ness" and "pinkness" in their intensity. The ensemble is



one of extreme decorativeness and is expressive of gentle, harmonious subtlety and restrained positiveness.

A group of eight was deliberately chosen as the most appropriate number of participants for this meal. That number allows for the talk to flow, like a composition by Bach, in harmonious oneness alternating with contrapuntal separation, without disintegrating into a disjointed set of separate conversations, as so frequently occurs with a larger assemblage. Thus, the grouping itself expresses the qualities of order, clarity, and organization which pervade the entire composition of the meal.

But once more we are brought back to the here-and-now table with the arrival of the platter bearing the roast of spring lamb. With their crusty, Cézannesque brown contours, the juicy pink slices of meat contrast richly against the garnish of even-sized, flaming-red tomatoes, each crowned by the dark stuffing of minced shallots and mushrooms bedded on sprigs of velvety green mint. The thumping pattern of solid volumes and glowing vibrant colors recalls the orderly simplicity of a country dance. Tender, milky-green *flageolet* beans, silkily gleaming, are served separately.

The sensuous experience created for us by the cook is no longer restrained. After the crescendo of the preceding courses, the meal is now played fortissimo. The boldness of the flavor of lamb enriched with a soupçon of garlic, the homogeneous firmness of its texture relieved by the buttered grittiness of bread crumbs coating the surface, the abundance of juices extracted with each bite are brought to a pitch by the sauce, which is the concentrated essence of all the ingredients. The stuffed tomatoes, despite their light watery texture, function as a strong counterbalance by virtue of their sharp acidity and their powerful aroma of baked mushrooms, herbs, and spices. The *flageolets* offer their uniquely subtle flavor and delicate texture, combining the mealiness of lima beans with the succulence of greens, to underscore the robustness of the lamb. The promise given to our eyes is fulfilled on our palate.

The vintage red Burgundy accompanying this course furthers the theme of great power and well-rounded weightiness and is laden with continuity of mellow overtones. It is

served in large balloon glasses that are capable of fittingly accommodating the ruby red splendor of its matured body and the unrivaled strength and reverberating fullness of its bouquet.

As we linger on the peak of this experience, we become aware of the significance of relationships. However ingeniously devised and expertly prepared a dish is, its success as a unit depends on what precedes it, what accompanies it, and what is to follow.

Our host had chosen not to serve a salad so that the mellowness created on our palate by the wine should not be disturbed, but, in fact, be continued through the cheese course. After the vigor of the meat course, our eyes are soothed by the chalky whites and creamy yellows of the milky goat cheese, the soft Brie, the buttery Belle Etoile, and the sculpturesque Emmenthal. We are regaled by a variety of intricately rich flavors and aromas, all saying cheese, but each having its own unmistakable identity and each offering its own special texture and color, set off by the crusty slices of fragrant French bread. As we leisurely savor our cheese, every bite followed by a sip of the wine, we discover how each increasingly supports and reinforces the other, finally achieving a vibrant, exquisitely blending, overflowing, symphonic culmination of flavor which, while defying description in words, may be compared in sensuous quality to the warm golden glow and juicy structural color of a Giorgione.

To paraphrase Dr. Barnes in the chapter on "Quality in Painting" of *The Art in Painting*, there are in every meal objective facts—composition, timing, texture, flavor and aroma—which experience enables the recipient to perceive as distinctive forms productive of aesthetic satisfaction. But, and now we quote Dr. Barnes, "the forms themselves will have little significance except as decorative patterns or as indications of represented subject matter, unless the spectator has within himself the spark of life which makes those forms living realities capable of setting in vibration feelings akin to those which the artist had when he painted the picture."\*

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\* *The Art in Painting*, Third Edition, Harcourt, Brace and World, N.Y., 1937, p. 43.



Nowhere does this statement hold more true than in the case of a meal viewed as a work of art and an aesthetic experience.

Up till this point, we have concerned ourselves chiefly with the creative side of the meal, but it is now, at cheese time, that the aesthetic response elicited by the meal in the receptive participants expresses itself in the form of lively, interesting conversation, relaxed mental and physical attitude, naturalness and spontaneity of talk, a feeling of empathy and shared sensation in which the host and hostess are included, and an all-pervasive atmosphere of warm, glowing comfort, ease, and satisfaction. There is a firmer integration of the participants in the experience created, a flowing harmony linking creator, created, and recipient. Cheese time is Venetian time.

Since all the participants are Barnes students, adding yet another feature of unity in variety, the conversation naturally evolves into an analysis of the meal, which, incidentally, will also summarize this talk, while its criticism shall be reserved for you, the audience. The intellectual activity of analyzing and commenting upon the meal sharpens the experience of the participants and makes it truly their own. We discover, then, that this meal contained all the elements that we look for in a work of art. There was selection, fittingness of means in the skillful use and blending of shapes, volumes, colors, textures, flavors, aromas, and timing, all coördinated to create a harmonious composition interlaced with a complex pattern of variety within its unity. Traditions were drawn upon, and a wealth of associations made. The order, precision, and timing of the meal, for instance, recall the cardinal rule of classic French drama: the unity of time, location, and action. Transferred values emerge in profusion.

The point is raised that, of all the fine arts, a meal has perhaps most in common with music, since it is an event that takes place in time and each course, like the movements of a symphony, has its own specific rhythm and flow dictated by its ingredients and by its place in the composition. The illustration of early summer was felt rather than depicted in the choice of flowers and foods. A high degree of decorativeness was achieved, especially in the table setting and in the

presentation of the salmon and now is being repeated with the arrival of the *vacherin*, a miraculously soaring, crisp meringue, filled with towering whipped cream, gently flavored with vanilla, and lusciously decorated with strawberries, the earliest of the season.

Broad human values were expressed in multiple media in a personal, characteristic, and unique way by the cook, and were experienced in similar manner by the participants. *The interplay between the creativity of the cook and responsive experience of the guests is, in the final analysis, what makes this meal into a work of art.*

But let us enjoy our dessert. Like the scherzo in a symphony, its light, airy fluidity, its levitated grace, and its triumphant decorativeness playfully change the warm Venetian-like glow of the atmosphere into gay, shimmering brightness and sparkling joy of the captured moment. Thus we come to the end of our meal.

Rather than blurring its brilliance with further analysis, let us raise our champagne-filled glasses in a toast to Miss de Mazia, without whose teaching we would not be assembled here and who imparted to us the principles involved in the preparation of this talk.

## Afterword

*by Ernest Pick*

We hope that our arguments and examples have made you share in our conviction that cuisine lends itself most suitably to being considered from the point of view of aesthetics and that, given the appropriate circumstances, it may be the basis for an aesthetic experience in the sense that John Dewey imparts to this term.

If that be so, then it follows that, upon occasions, the experience, as a creative act, may reach the pinnacle of being a work of art. Why is it, then, that cuisine is so rarely recognized as such and that it is commonly omitted in definitions and discussions of art?

I should like to advance some thoughts which may explain this paradox.



In the first place, the reason seems to lie in the circumstances under which such a work of art may take shape. As we noted in our talk, a work of cuisine, like a piece of music, is an event that takes place in time. But, unlike a musical work, it occurs only once and can never be repeated. It cannot be annotated and preserved, or hung on the wall like a painting, patiently awaiting the moment of aesthetic response by an actively interested listener or viewer. It must realize itself instantly, here and now; it must find a responsive audience at the very moment of creation or else be forever lost in unredeemable oblivion. It is not often in the life of a cook or a gourmet that such an event takes place, and it is almost impossible to share it with anyone outside the experience.

Secondly, while you may well say that a painting, as an instance of universally recognized art, needs a viewer in order to project itself into the world as a significant aesthetic object and be acknowledged as such, there is no doubt in my mind that the painter, when he is successful to his own satisfaction in achieving what he set out to do, has had a complete experience of artistic creation, regardless of and separately from any intent to convey the content of his achievement to the rest of us. For the cook, this is not possible: in order to realize his creative moment, he must have the response of an appreciative eater, and both participants must experience the interplay of creating and receiving in order for an artistic experience to emerge. Again, this does not often happen.

Thirdly, as we stated in our talk, the artistic expression in cuisine occurs in multiple media, and it may be that a multimedia production occupies a lower rung on the ladder of artistic quality than one in which the artist communicates with us through only one of the senses.

Finally, it may be that—in a world in which “ART” has come to be considered as something separate from ordinary life, reserved for an elite of connoisseurs rather than regarded as a culmination and an extract of everyday experience—the art of cuisine, which appeals primarily to the more primitive and phylogenetically older senses of touch and taste, just does not command the valuation that we attach

to the creative material that we receive through the highly developed medium of our eyes.

In conclusion, I shall say with Dr. Barnes that, in the final analysis, there can be no criteria laid down by which the artistic quality of differing media can be measured or compared. It must be left to an intuitive sense that each of us may possess to make a judgement of this nature and, hence, to assign a proper place to his gastronomic experiences in the cabinet of his aesthetic memory. And this is where I must now invite you to state your thoughts on this difficult, yet most delightful subject.



# Analysis in Aesthetics: Brief Comments

by ELLEN HOMSEY

*[Sense impressions] convey nothing to us unless we can interpret them, . . . and interpretation is possible only to one who can bring the residue or record of past experience to bear on any particular situation with which he may be confronted.*

—Albert C. Barnes\*

ETYMOLOGICALLY and pragmatically, objective method stands for a process of observation and reflection unclouded by human feeling. In common usage, it is synonymous with the pursuit of demonstrable truth, specifically in terms of its most potent instrument of investigation, analysis.

It is hardly debatable that we could have no traditions of knowledge, nor, in fact, any effective understanding, without the exercise of our capacity for objectivity. But while it is plain that objectivity is the *sine qua non* of the sciences and that it provides the basis for any responsible or fruitful practical inquiry, its application to more subtle areas of insight, in particular, to the field of aesthetics, has not been so readily acknowledged. How, runs the argument, can there be “observation and reflection unclouded by human feeling” in that field when the meaning of a work of art† lies in the very power it has to move us emotionally, intellectually, and imaginatively? And, further, what relevance can analytical investigation, which in practical research refers to the making of precise measurements and elemental identifications, have to an object the nature of which is to express qualities reflective of human responsiveness itself? In short, how can one arrive at abiding demonstrable truths about a form of actuality that is, in terms of its significance, experiential rather than physical, especially in the cut-and-dried format of analytical discussion?‡

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\* *The Art in Painting*, (Third Edition), Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., (New York, 1937), p. 5.

† In this discussion, work of art shall, for the sake of simplicity, be used to mean painting, although what is said applies to aesthetic expression in general.

‡ It might be remarked that the article in this issue of the JOURNAL by Violette de Mazia, “Creative Distortion,” as well as her essays in previous issues, stands as an unassailable refutation of this criticism.

In order to deal with these questions, it is necessary to make note of a few obvious qualifications, and their more immediate implications, of objective methodology. First, we should recognize that objectivity is transitive: it becomes a mode of thought and a process of examination only in reference to a phenomenal event. Hence, any legitimate analysis must take cognizance of the principles of actuality governing the form of that event, for the illustration of which we might cite such familiar examples in scientifically oriented study as the "laws" of gravity, thermodynamics, inertia, etc.

Secondly, we should bear in mind that the primary intent of analysis (*i.e.*, applied objectivity), whether used in practical or aesthetic investigation, is to specify the identity of an object or event from the point of view of a specific, present or potential function. In practical analysis, the identity established corresponds, of course, to a utilitarian function: thus, for example, analysis in sociological research may be directed towards ascertaining the identity of a situation, by way of a survey of its components according to the principles of cause-effect, as a source of criminality.

Thirdly, we should be aware of the fact that an enacted analysis itself has a distinct form; it does not provide a duplicate model of the original event or object, but an interpretation of it, and the form of this interpretation is that of a symbolic, or conceptual, re-presentation (verbal, mathematical) of certain of its essential elements. Since symbols are learned, we may also say that the original is re-created in material which has a pre-established meaning to us. Therefore, one of the important consequences of symbolizing an event is that it is thereby, in a special, ideational way, spontaneously correlated with the already known, and this, in its very happening, lends a new dimension to its actuality: if, for example, we are able to grasp a table in a symbolic metaphor of feet and inches and through the names of the type of wood used and the style followed, we have by that not only given it a conceptual identity, but, in so doing, have related it to some extent to all our experiences of size, construction materials, and types of design; and, because of this, it acquires possibilities of meaning much more complex and profound than those it has as an unembellished sense im-



pression, for apprehending through the vantage of one's background of experiences is the equivalent of understanding.

Lastly, we might point out that the proof of the new entity provided by analysis, the symbolic representation, lies only in whether it sufficiently accounts for significant characteristics of the original event to allow every one capable of responding intelligently to the symbols used to grasp that event in the new terms of the conceptual insight. In other words, analysis consists in communication of observations, and this communication occurs in a framework that embodies both the thing observed and our own general relevant experience.

The preceding considerations are self-evident in the application of analysis to practical matters, especially when the event under study is treated as a confirmatory physical or factual entity. A work of art, however, is, as we indicated earlier, defined not by any measurable or finite characteristics—such as, in the case of painting, the size of the canvas, the amount of paint used, the square inches occupied by particular colors, etc.—but by the experience it provides as we perceive it, and, correspondingly, its function derives from the fact that as sensate beings we enjoy, for its own sake, the activity of perceiving (sensing and understanding)\* the matter of our environment. Hence, when we speak of a work of art as a re-molding of the world “nearer to the heart's desire,” what we mean is that the artist works in a concentrated way with those attributes of things which afford such satisfaction as perception itself offers.

To return now to the conditions of objective methodology, this time with a view to its aptness as a means to understanding aesthetic events, we can assert without fear of protest that works of art—including ballets, novels, symphonies, etc., as well as paintings—fulfill the first of our criteria, *i.e.*, that of existing phenomenally, and, it follows from the above, that their form may be said to be governed by the principles which govern perception *per se*. These are, broadly speak-

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\* For a thoroughgoing and trenchant study of the meaning of perception see: Violette de Mazia, “Method,” *The Barnes Foundation Journal of the Art Department*, Vol. I, No. 1, (Spring, 1970), The Barnes Foundation Press, Merion, Pa., pp. 12–18.

ing, the devices by which the stuff of the world acquires coherence, and their concrete elaboration occurs as those features of a thing which define its sensuous, as opposed to its intrinsically physical, identity. They include, on the one hand, the psychological devices of unity or organization—as, for example, repetition or rhythm, sequentiality or relationship—and, on the other hand, the devices by which recognizable specificity or individuality, hence, variety, is achieved—as, for example, contrast, finitude, intensity. Thus, when we state that a painting has a sensuous rather than physical identity, we make reference, in part, to the fact that conditions of perception are realized through its visual components—its color, the contours, shapes, and volumes it presents, the variations of light and dark—rather than through its quantitative and elemental makeup. Accordingly, it is with these visual features that analysis of paintings is first concerned.

The fact that a work of art is defined sensuously rather than physically does not, of course, mean that it is for that at the mercy of the whim of the beholder, for we could not fairly argue that we are less likely to agree with each other (at least to the extent that our vocabulary allows for a sufficient fineness of distinction to be made) that an area of color is red or yellow, or some subtly qualified variation thereof, a linear sequence curved or angular, a shape flat or three-dimensional than we are to an observation that something weighs fifteen grams or that it contains a given number of hydrogen ions in relation to its other constituents. Indeed, all of these traits of things, regardless of how much intervening equipment might be needed to register them, are ultimately verifiable only through our senses.

At the same time, however, sensing in itself is an activity accompanied by feelings in the form of physiological excitation, and these feelings are inherently identifiable with particular qualities we attribute to the causative agent: a bright red, for example, which stimulates us in one way, is to us a “lively,” “hot,” or “vivid” color, while a blue, which stimulates us differently, is “muted,” “quiet,” “cool”; likewise, a line may have an easy continuous flow which we find graceful or an abrupt, coarse angularity



which we call rugged. And, because as human we are relatively like in our physiological mechanism, these designations are neither arbitrary nor subjective. What, therefore, we can further conclude from the fact that a work of art is a sensuous entity is that it functions qualitatively and that, despite the fact that such qualities as we may perceive are but echoes of our own specific feelings, they reside in, are of, are induced by the visual components of the work itself. Thus, when we say, for instance, that a Cézanne painting is of interest for certain qualities, *i.e.*, that it functions in terms of weightiness, color power, static drama, etc.,\* we are, if our remarks are drawn from intelligent observation of the visual components, speaking of objectively verifiable characteristics.

In the light of the foregoing, we can conclude that both aesthetic and practical events fulfill the criteria of objectivity and, correspondingly, that analysis is capable of serving to specify functional identity in each case from an equally coherent position. Where the problem arises for those who refuse to accept analytical investigation as a means of understanding a work of art is in the nature of the form, the symbolic entity, of analysis itself. For there is, in fact, an important difference between the form of an aesthetic analysis and that of a scientific one, specifically, a difference in the respective relationship of the analysis to the original event.

When we re-create a physical, as opposed to sensuous, event in analytical terms, we cast it, for all intents and purposes, in an ideational framework that embodies its basic

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\* To leap from the quality of the color red to the expressive statement of a Cézanne painting may strike the reader as a bit audacious at this point, though a general justification is attempted later. The gap is concretely bridged in the article "Learning to See" by Violette de Mazia (*ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 1, Spring, 1972, pp. 7-27). A painting does not, needless to say, consist in an adventitious accretion of qualities belonging to the raw materials of visual expression (with the exception, perhaps, of certain so-called art works that are, in reality, mere pieces of red, blue, or some other color canvas). For, when the artist works, it is in terms of the principles of perception: he selects and organizes his means with a view towards exposing new qualitative ideas. Cézanne's weightiness, power, and drama come about as a result of his unique handling of color; they are embedded in a complex set of subject, color, line, light, and so on, relationships that exist nowhere else in the world but in his picture.

causes; that is, we show it not as we take it in upon confrontation, but as it relates to the how and why of material being in general. In other words, its development is based on our powers of rationality rather than on the sensuous characteristics of reality: even so simple a tool of understanding as a numerical designation of weight or the name of a constituent element carries in it an independent ideational meaning—one which we, in fact, invented—and that meaning, in turn, carries implications that may be derived only from the symbolic form itself. The proof of this lies in the fact that, given the appropriate background and sufficient analytical data, a scientist can proceed from a representative entity alone to legitimate new hypotheses, conclusions, and discoveries. Likewise, the form is what we might call inevitable, for the possibility of deducing new discoveries from it bespeaks an unalterable exactitude of interpretation. We may, therefore, say that, in the case of analysis of a physical event, the new entity, the symbolic representation, stands as self-supporting or usable in its own right, absolute in the sense that only certain symbols will provide the proper meaning, and permanent or definitive insofar as the available machinery for analysis is perfected.

None of the above conditions pertains to analysis of experiential, or aesthetic, events. Indeed, a comparable listing of the components of a sensuous actuality would embody virtually nothing that our eyes or ears could not give with much greater fullness and accuracy. This is because, as we can conclude from our earlier remarks, the reference for a symbolic representation of an aesthetic object lies not in our rationality, but in the activity of sensing. Hence, the analytical entity—like an expert analysis of a play in a ball game—is of relatively indifferent interest or significance apart from its source in the world.

Furthermore, since aesthetic analysis is grounded in the sensuous actuality of a work of art, it must be concerned with what happens in terms of the interaction among the expressive means, happenings which occur as specified relationships—as in Cézanne's rendition of an exciting balance of disbalance through his distortion of subject, his instrumental use of color, line, volume, shape, etc., and the organi-



zational framework that contains them.\* These relationships result in newly embodied qualities, but they are qualities which we meet again and again in an infinite variety of presentations in the course of our daily living. We may, for instance, know solidity as expressed by granite, by a thin piece of metal, by Titian, El Greco, or Renoir, by a boxer's punch, by the settled thrust of the buttresses of a Romanesque church, by, more subtly, a well-reasoned argument; and any or all of these experiences may be re-created conceptually, symbolically, for the light they shed on the meaning of the present work. And since a work of art taps some aspect of the entire mass of our experiences at any one time, the language by which one may express a given insight, the means of interpreting, unlike that of science, is as unlimited as our knowledge of language itself.†

Needless to say, then, analysis does not stand in place of the work of art, nor does it provide a definitive re-enactment of it. Rather, it is an instrument for enhancing and deepening our experience of that work as an immediately and uniquely expressive entity, a framework by which our background of experience can systematically and more or less exhaustively be brought to bear upon the present occasion of the artist's creation. In this function, analysis of aesthetic material exists, no less than an intelligible discovery in practical studies, as an expressed understanding that all may share in and which, for that, makes the matter analyzed available to us to the limits of our powers of conception.

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\* See Violette de Mazia, "Creative Distortion," p. 13 of this JOURNAL.

† Indeed, the vastness of the vocabularies of highly "civilized" societies seems to support the idea that a greater variety of experiences forces the development of richer means of expression, a larger fund of verbal tools for making finer and finer distinctions and for establishing shades of meaning of sufficient subtlety to answer an increasing intellectual and emotional awareness. On the converse side, when thinking becomes shallow and reference loses touch with actuality, as in the case of advertising copy, language degenerates into jargon and cliché; similarly, when feeling becomes detached from an ongoing causative event, expression relinquishes its relationship with the outside world, language ceases to embody insight, and vocabulary shrinks to a few repetitive catch phrases.

# The Early Egyptian Art Tradition

## Old and Middle Kingdoms\*

by PATRICIA NEUBAUER†

### On Viewing an Ancient Egyptian Skeleton

*Poor crippled skeleton lying  
In ancient sycamore coffin—  
Thousands of years ago, when the  
Pyramids were new and shining,  
One felt pity for you and laid  
Your walking stick beside you.*

*And once long, long ago  
Did it happen that you  
With your cat going down  
To the edge of the Nile  
Frightened wild birds from  
Papyrus reeds to send  
Them whirling high into  
Bright, morning sky?*

—P. N.

**Geographical, Historical, Cultural Background.** Tradition is a language, and, like any language, it is the collective invention of a particular group. Tradition provides the means for human communication because its body of inter-related values, forms and skills grows out of the common experience of the group. Tradition contributes adornment to man's life and continuity to his history. It can be likened to an inheritance insofar as it is handed down from generation to generation. But, of course, it is more than this, for it combines the memory of the past with the needs of the present and the vision of the future.

No tradition is generated spontaneously. It develops from and evolves out of what has gone before. In the case of the Egyptian art tradition, however, we cannot trace its origins to previous traditions, for we know of none which

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\* Originally presented as a talk to the Seminar of the Art Department.

† Member of the Seminar.



was available to its artists. Instead, we must be content to discover its sources in the unique character of the land from which it sprang and in the needs and values of the great civilization which created it.

The ancient kingdom of Egypt\* was made up of the Fayum (a depression in the west consisting of a large oasis surrounded by hills), the Delta and a narrow strip of exceedingly fertile land along the Nile. From the Mediterranean to the first cataract at Aswan the length of the river valley is 750 miles; the arable land varies from two to twelve miles in width. The valley, for the most part, is shut in by cliffs on either side and is isolated by the Arabic desert to the east and the Libyan desert to the west. At Siut the Bahr Yusuf (River Joseph) leaves the main channel of the Nile and flows into the Fayum.

Having originally been the gift of the Nile, this narrow strip of land continued to be refreshed by its waters and fertilized by its yearly inundation. The fields yielded abundant harvests of grain and flax. Gardens and vineyards, sustained by irrigation, supplied the people with a variety of fruits and vegetables. Domesticated animals flourished. The river teemed with fish. Wild fowl inhabited its papyrus marshes. The river banks provided mud for bricks and clay for pottery, and the nearby cliffs stone for large-scale building. Alabaster, basalt, slate, quartzite were also available within the valley. Though the deserts were not part of the kingdom proper, they fell, from earliest times, within the sphere of Egyptian influence. Gold, copper and semi-precious stones were mined in the eastern desert. Vineyards and date plantations were situated in the oases of the western desert. The ancient Egyptian lived in a veritable paradise, and one of the most endearing traits of his character is that he recognized this paradise for what it was.

The Nile offered easy transportation for vast quantities of materials, as well as a pleasant, rapid means of travel. This river highway, which can be navigated without interruption from sea to cataracts, made possible the unification of Egypt and the administration of that kingdom after unifica-

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\* See map, Plate 39.

tion had taken place. The river was also the chief means of contact between Egypt and the outside world, for it gave entrance through the seaports at its mouth to the merchants and products of Asia Minor. Aswan at its upper end was the market town through which entered the commodities of Nubia and the Sudan. Subsidiary roads by which Egypt established contacts outside her domain were networks of desert tracks leading southwest to the Sudan or eastward to the ports of the Red Sea.

As the rhythm of Egyptian life was determined by the yearly inundation of the Nile—rising in June and July, flooding in late summer and receding in October—so was the rhythm of its history determined by the waxing and waning of pharaonic power. Three times Egypt rose to a prosperous united kingdom; three times ambitious overreaching brought about the fall of the kingdom.

The main political problem was always that of maintaining unity in this 750 mile-long kingdom. If the king was strong and his organization forcefully efficient, the country remained united. When a weak pharaoh sat upon the throne, civil wars among contenders for his place separated the country. Then, Egypt, in a feeble condition, fell prey to invaders, for there were always the strangers at the gate—the nomads of the deserts, the rival kingdoms of the east and the peoples to the south beyond the cataracts.

During the era of pre-history some forty provinces, or nomes, each with its own prince, grew up along the river banks. Gradually these nomes were organized into two loose federations of states. Toward the end of the fourth millennium B.C., the two kingdoms were united. Henceforth, Egypt was known as the Land of the Two Kingdoms, and its king wore a double crown.

The history of the early dynastic period is shadowy, but it should be recognized that it is during these five centuries that the distinctive form of Egyptian culture took shape. This is when art traditions crystallized, when writing became a flexible and comprehensible instrument for documentation and expression, when the concept of government raying out from a strong central authority evolved.

The great pyramids, built at the peak of the Old Kingdom's



vitality, tell us much about the age in which they were constructed. As royal tombs, they intimate how utterly these god-kings were the focus of collective human existence. One is astonished when one contemplates the vast labor force and wealth which must have been required for their erection, but astonishment is doubled when one begins to realize how great must have been the organization which channelled these resources. The pyramids stand not only as memorials to powerful kings, but also as monuments to the enduring patience, the disciplined strength of many humbler men.

These pyramids were symbolic of the heights toward which the Old Kingdom reached. This reaching, however, was, in actuality, an overreaching, for the kingdom began to sink beneath the economic stress imposed by their erection. At the same time, the nobles, envious of the king's power, grew restive and began to assert their independence. Toward the end of the third millennium the kingdom broke into fragments.

The period intermediate between the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom was ancient Egypt's darkest hour. Every noble was king in his province, and civil strife was rampant. Nomads invaded the Delta. Trade with the outside world ceased. Art withered. Historical records were no longer kept.

Although the old political, artistic and religious traditions seem to have been reinstated when Egypt was reunited under the kings of the Eleventh Dynasty, the Middle Kingdom was not a replica of the Old Kingdom, for the boldness and confidence characteristic of earlier days were tempered by fear and caution: the king feared insurrection; it was necessary to recognize the status of the provincial princes, but at the same time to bring them under his control. The general fear of civil war and invasion resulted in the establishment of a professional army. Areas falling under the Egyptian sphere of influence were more carefully guarded, and the kingdom was extended beyond the third cataract so that access to the trade routes serving the river valley would not be cut off. Fear of famine led to a systematic recording of the Nile's level, allowing its degree of flooding to be estimated in advance. The lake in the Fayum was excavated so that it

could be used as a reservoir. Furthermore, a large middle class, something new in Egypt, had come into being. All these changes required a more complex central government with an intricate bureaucracy, and this in turn required a new capital situated in the center of the kingdom.

Fear is not an emotion which we ordinarily associate with creativity—but fear (or the memory of danger), combined with the peculiar vitality of the Egyptian people, produced a kingdom which was probably the most politically and economically successful of all three ancient kingdoms. The Middle Kingdom has come to be regarded as the classical period of Egyptian art and literature.

When the Twelfth Dynasty ended there was no leader strong enough to establish himself king over both Upper and Lower Egypt. Sometime during the early eighteenth century B.C. the Middle Kingdom fell. Egypt again became a collection of petty provincial kingdoms.

The complexities of the Egyptian religion can be simplified by relating the principal gods to the two natural forces which mattered most to the ancient Egyptian. These forces were the sun and the Nile. The story of Egyptian religion is essentially a story of the rivalry between the bright solar deity Râ and dark Osiris, god of the river and vegetation.

The earliest official religion was that of the sun-god cult, which was native to upper Egypt. The king, being the son of Râ, was divine. Only he could look forward to eternal life after death.

The Osirian cult, probably of Syrian origin, was connected with the Delta area. It revolved around the myth of the death and resurrection of Osiris: Osiris was slain by his brother Set. Isis, Osiris' wife-sister, after arduous searching found his body and preserved it by embalming. Hidden in the Delta marshes she gave birth to their son Horus. When Horus reached manhood he avenged his father's death. Osiris was then brought back to life and became ruler of the Underworld. At first the Osirian religion belonged to the common people, for it was they whose lives were most intimately connected with soil and the flooding and recession of the Nile. This tale of a wife's devotion and a son's loyalty had great appeal for the common people through identifica-



tion. And they hoped that Osiris, who gave bountifully in this life, would be as generous when they, in death, became his subjects.

Toward the end of the Old Kingdom the Osirian cult began to be interwoven with that of Râ, and, by the time of the Middle Kingdom, immortality was no longer the sole prerogative of the king. All who could afford the necessary ritual and funeral equipment had claim to eternal life.

As one considers the geography of Egypt, pores over her ancient history and religion, reads the scraps of her literature which have survived and examines her other arts, one is constantly struck by the contrast of opposites which pervade every aspect of her land, history and culture. One is aware of the sharp line of demarcation between the barren desert and the fertile areas, of the contrast between the flowing, ever-changing Nile and the solid, unchanging cliffs which enclose its valley. One beholds the sun-bright, imperishable Râ, the obelisk invading the realm of the falcon. At the same time one remembers dark Osiris, who dies anew each year and reigns over the subterranean world of the silent-hearted. One thinks: These were people who ruled with formidable discipline, who possessed superb talent for organization, yet twice was their kingdom broken into bits, and twice thrown into chaos; these were people who overthrew their mighty dynasties but who continued the tradition of a divine monarch and preserved their art forms and religious rituals over a period of three or four millennia. One grows sensitive to the implications of the double symbol of the pharaohs' power—the crook and the flail.

**The Visual Arts.** This counterpoint of contrasts is also evident in Egypt's visual arts. Our perception delights in the contrast between pyramid that defies penetration and the grand pylon (gateway building) and hypostyle hall (roof resting on columns) which invite entrance, or that between the weighty formality of royal sculpture and the folksy informality of the tomb figurines. The eye is caught by the play of delicacy against massiveness, decorativeness against power, elegance against rude sturdiness and the curve against the angle. Our overall impression is not of paradox

or contradiction, but of unity, for the genius of Egyptian art is due, in part, to the fusion of the element of static rigidity with the element of changing fluidity. From this fusion evolved an art tradition of great vitality.

Most of the art of the Egyptians has come down to us from tombs or mortuary temples. Even so, we ought not to think of this art as death-oriented, for the Egyptian expected eternal life to be a replica of temporal life, with the same needs, the same pleasures and responsibilities. His immortality depended on the preservation of his body and the equipment that was buried with him. His portrait-statues were the dwelling places of his soul. They were set near the offering table where his family left gifts or put in the temples so that he might continue to share in the ceremonies of religious holidays. They served as a substitute in case his body should decay. Furniture and other household articles which the deceased had used during his lifetime were entombed with him. In the case of serfs, lands, houses and boats this was impossible, and these were therefore reproduced in model form or in wall reliefs and paintings.

From the Egyptian point of view, the most important aspect of the visual arts was the illustrative. It was important to represent the subject facts. In drawing it was important to select those details, poses or gestures which best defined the functions which the person or object was expected to fulfill.\*

So successful were these ancient artists as illustrators that the everyday life of Egypt can be re-constructed on the basis of their art. Most people, unfortunately, see in Egyptian art nothing more than quaint historical documentation. Because they permit interest in subject to take precedence over interest in subject matter,† they fail to grasp the aesthetic reality. The fact that this art is primarily a human expression which, by means of color, shape, line, mass,

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\* One might add, though it is not pertinent to the appreciation of the art in Egyptian painting and sculpture, that these representations were not to the Egyptian representations, but ultimately became, once the necessary magical incantations were pronounced, the actuality they represented.

†The subject is the objective starting point; the subject matter is the matter that makes up the subject in the created piece.



rhythm, variety and unity, delights the senses and communicates certain values that modern man holds in common with the ancient Egyptian is completely overlooked.

**Examples.** Plates 44 and 45 represent the "Palette of Narmer" from the First Dynasty. Cosmetics were mixed on its surface, and its decoration is said to signify the original unification of Egypt effected by the conquest of the Delta region by a southern king. The upper band of the front view shows the two heads of the cow goddess, Hathor, between which appears the king's name and the façade of his palace. The second register depicts the king, wearing the crown of Lower Egypt, followed by his sandal-bearer and preceded by his vizier and men carrying standards. He goes to review the ranks of his beheaded enemies. Below, two fantastic animals create the well for pigment by means of intertwined necks. Beneath these, a bull invades a walled city and tramples the king's enemy. On the reverse side, again we find the heads of the cow goddess and, below them, the king, this time wearing the crown of Upper Egypt and grasping a foe by the hair as he makes ready to deliver the fatal blow. To the right, the falcon god, Horus, is shown holding captive a representation of Lower Egypt. At the bottom are two bodies of the vanquished. Very well then, so much for the subject. Let us now turn our attention to the subject matter.

The Palette is one of the earliest examples of the Egyptian tradition as it is manifested in the two-dimensional arts (*i.e.*, relief and painting). Certain conventions have already been established, and these conventions will hold sway for nearly three thousand years. First, the king is shown considerably larger than any other figure—a literal and childlike way of stating his importance. Secondly, the picture is composed in friezelike bands, commonly called "registers." Thirdly, there is no attempt at linear perspective, no attempt to create an impression of deep space. One reads upward rather than back into space. The artist states his facts on a two dimensional surface, and he is not interested in three-dimensional illusion; the space that surrounds drawn objects

is the important space.\* Fourthly, selectivity, which is the chief requirement of drawing, has already been done by tradition for the artist. Specific parts of the body are typically rendered in their most essential views: head, legs and arms are shown in profile; the eyes, shoulders and torso are presented frontally. This convention, though it imposes a certain amount of restraint on the artist, can, as we shall see later on, contribute unity and liveliness to the overall composition. It is amazing how much variety of pose can be achieved in spite of this, perhaps largely by way of the illustrative circumstance: in the case of the Narmer Palette, for example, the king strikes, his victim is twisted and forced to his knees, and other figures fall beneath his feet and those of the bull.

Besides these pictorial conventions there are other more basic characteristics displayed here which apply to the tradition as a whole. As already indicated, painting and relief are heavily weighted in the direction of the illustrative. (Indeed, this Palette is the Egyptian's history book and ours as well for this period.) The subject facts are important; the artist may not obscure them, though he has freedom to interpret them by metaphor and simile. The king has the strength and bravery of a bull: he overthrows the city walls; he tramples upon his enemies. Like the falcon, he seizes his prey.

There was, for the Egyptian, a deeply felt need to decorate articles of use: this Palette did not fulfill its function any better because it was decorated; a stone with an indentation would have done as well. Since its decoration depicts a great historical event, we assume that it was used in some sort of ritual or ceremony. Articles of everyday use were also decorated, but with motifs of birds and flowers.

Another general characteristic of Egyptian art is its symmetry. The shape of the Palette is symmetrical. Each of the two horns at the top reiterates the other, and both sides, front and back, carry identical goddess heads. The decorative motif between the horns is of particular symmetry: the

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\* As we look at examples of painting and relief, we shall come to realize that the successful handling of this kind of space imparts a certain harmony, that these intervals of space have a great deal to do with compositional rhythm.



fantastic animals mirror each other as they encircle the pigment cup—but behold the subtlest variety in the two figures who lead them, not exact duplication, yet perfect balance.

There is in early Egyptian painting and relief a strong dependence on line—whether the line is painted or is incised or created by the shadow cast from areas slightly raised, as in the case of the Palette. Objects are defined by line. The Egyptian line is simple and controlled.

Lastly, I want to point out the sensuous appeal of the smoothly polished slate surface. Each material used by the Egyptian artist, whether stone, gem, glass, wood or metal, has its own special quality and, in general, the sensuous appeal results from the artist's technical mastery and from his sensitivity to the peculiar character of the chosen medium.

I call the slate sculpture illustrated in Plate 40 "Portrait of an Uncomplicated Royal Marriage"; however, the Boston Museum prefers to call it "King Mycerinus and his Queen." I know nothing about the sort of marriage this Fourth Dynasty king shared with his queen. The title was suggested to me by qualities of the piece itself.

A conjunction between this man and this woman is established literally and compositionally. The two figures have been cut from one block, and the remaining web of stone, though it fulfills the purpose of protective support, also keeps the two figures from being separate (it is not one and one more, it is two together). The shoulder of the left figure overlaps and touches the shoulder of the right-hand figure; the connection is reënforced by the woman's gesture of light embrace. There is very little difference between the two figures in either size or pose. The lines of the king's head-dress are echoed in those of the queen's wig as both fall from behind the ears to the shoulders. The impression of serenity is conveyed not by means of facial expression, but, rather, by the cleanness of the surface—its lack of detail and superficial decoration. Though the figures are somewhat thick and massive, the elongation of the legs, especially from knee to ankle, and the frontal narrowness of the hips rescue them from grossness. As in most such work, the heads are done

with controlled detail and a careful working out of the planes of facial structure, but the bodies are summarily treated. The queen figure is somewhat less important, less emphatic than that of the king: she stands slightly behind him, her wig is a softened version of his headdress, and her long gown tends to transform the figure into a column.

Convention limited to two the poses in which royal persons could be portrayed in free standing sculpture: one was a sitting pose, the other a standing pose; both were severely frontal, rigid and static. It is probably this restriction which leads one to speak of "formal" Egyptian sculpture as opposed to "informal" sculpture. The lower the social position of the subject, the greater the relaxation of this convention: thus, the poses of children, peasants, foreigners are more varied. Animal poses (except in cases where the animal represents a god) are fluidly natural.

The intent of the creator of the Fifth Dynasty piece shown on Plates 42 and 43 was to portray a particular person whose occupation is that of a scribe. A man who was a scribe held a relatively high social position. In fact, this profession frequently raised a man into a higher class. The pose of scribes, though freer than those of royalty or nobility, was still prescribed by convention.

The distortions and simplifications of the composition of this work grew out of the sculptor's design. In common with other artist illustrators, he began by choosing a characteristic pose. The subject has been caught in a moment of poised movement. However, unlike the poses selected by Daumier, Goya and Degas, one has the conviction that this pose can be held for a long period of time.

Frontally viewed, the torso seems relatively slender, but, when seen in profile, one realizes that it is quite thick and that its basic shape is that of a pyramid. The hips and legs are disproportionately heavy, functioning as a base for the pyramidal mass. The kilt, more rigid than any piece of cloth would be, serves as the scribe's writing table. The slight crossing of the eyes and the prominence of the ears create the impression of focused attention. The hand that once held a pen is firmly and fully drawn, while the feet are



abbreviated into three toes. Except for the relaxed pectoral muscles and the indication of the collarbones, there is very little musculature or skeletal framework of the body visible. What we see here is an editing of anatomy in the service of the illustration of the man's function. He has no purpose in life except to write down dictation. The restraint of surface detail cuts distracting shadow to a minimum.

The composition from the frontal view is essentially that of a sturdy column set surely upon a horizontal base. The vertical part—head and torso—is varied and related to the base by a series of horizontal lines or shadows made of the hairline, brows and eyes, mouth, collarbones, pectoral muscles, crease of diaphragm, inner bend of the elbows. The triangle formed by the crossed legs and edge of the kilt-skirt is reversed in the chest shadows and repeated in the chin.

As we descend to the lower levels of society, poses grow less erect and less static, presentation is no longer strictly frontal and, as a result, sculpture loses its formality and grandeur. The pose of the figure in Plate 50 not only says peasant woman grinding grain, but suggests a variety of other humble, homey occupations. The figure itself, with its fusion of curve and angle, is expressive of unreleased energy, but it is the forward extension of the base to accommodate the grinding stone and the elongation of the bracing toes that endow it with motion. The eye, moving from toe to heel, to knee, to hip, to shoulder, to hands upon the grinder, does not come to rest at that point, but travels down the slope of the grinding stone to complete the arrested movement. No anatomical detail hinders the eye's freedom of motion or dilutes the primary impression of rude power. The painting of the hair and eyes adds vivacity.

At the bottom rung of the social ladder we would find such a being as the pygmy, an ivory figure of the Twelfth Dynasty (Plate 51)—probably a court jester. With this piece we have traveled far from the weighty mass of the "formal" sculpture epitomized in the Mycerinus group. The furrowed forehead, the protruding eyebrows and the lopsided mouth give animated expression to the face; whether the

creature experiences joy or apprehension I cannot say. Space is trapped between the arms and body, between the bent knees, and the pressed-together hands thrusting upward like a spear betray aggressiveness. There is unity of angularity in the two triangular spaces between arms and body and the diamond-shaped space between the legs made up of two triangles; the angle of the elbows is repeated in the angle of the knees.

Much of what I shall say about relief is applicable to painting, and *vice versa*. Egyptian relief is only slightly raised above the surface of its background. Reliefs were painted, and paintings were drawn with line cut into the surface of the slab. In the case of Egyptian art, it seems most sensible to class relief and painting together.\* Indeed, murals done in paint alone occur only where the material used was not suitable for carving, as in the Theban area, where the limestone is of inferior quality. The reliefs that I shall discuss are cut from stone. With one exception, which will be noted, they all come from the tombs at Saqqara.

We recognized in the "Palette of Narmer" the Egyptian partiality for linear drawing.† Egyptian painting and relief depend upon line for effect in the same way that a folk song depends upon melody. It is true that two-dimensional art which is chiefly linear and music which is chiefly melodic are in some ways limited, but one should appreciate the degree

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\* For his painting the Egyptian had a very limited palette, consisting of common earth and mineral colors plus carbon in one form or another for his black. His red was iron oxide; his yellow was made of ochre; green was of malachite; and blue was usually azurite or a silica copper. These pigments were ground in water. Gum, glue or egg white was added to make the mixture adhesive. As a rule, the surface to be painted was first covered with gesso (a dense absorbent white, usually chalk) before painting. No pigment has as much brilliancy as that which is laid over a white ground. Varnish of some sort was applied over the painting for protection and preservation.

In the paintings, color is compartmented. It is applied in flat areas without modeling. If the painter wishes to indicate texture or folds of material, he does so by means of line. Line is sometimes black, but more frequently red or ochre. Variety exists in the juxtaposition of one brightly colored area against another brightly colored area. Unity results from balance, repetition and the use of colors of the same intensity. Convention dictates that there shall be a "lady" color (yellow) and a "man" color (red).

† Drawing can be achieved by means other than line—*e.g.*, by light and dark, color, etc.



of power, piquancy and vitality that line and melody must embody if they are to carry the burden of expressiveness successfully.

The relief reproduced on Plate 48 shows hunting dogs bringing down antelope and a lion attacking a bull. There is little or no modeling, and color is absent. Thus, its effect depends solely on line, which is created either by incision or as a result of the shadow cast by slightly raised surfaces. The line is Giottoesque in its clean simplicity and its restrained fluidity. It defines accurately the contours of the animals. It depicts their interrelated actions. The variety of its direction creates a continuous flow from object to object. Where individual groups are unconnected and discrete, the sinuous line of the foreground contour and the base line of the landscape strip at the upper right bridge over and connect. Plastic movement and drama are not conveyed by mere portrayal of the subject facts—the struggle between animals—but through contrast between curved lines (horns, twist of neck) and rigid straight lines (braced forelegs of bull, supporting hind legs of dogs). Lines in the manner of hatching (vegetation, lion's mane) contribute areas of decorative surfaces.

I also spoke of space as it exists around objects when we considered the Narmer Palette. The First Dynasty stele (shown on Plate 41) also illustrates this very well. In addition, it is an excellent example of what I like to call the "Abydos tradition." Reliefs and hieroglyphs from Abydos often have this characteristic spaciousness, achieved by placement which is classical in feeling. Pictures, motifs and hieroglyphs have neither too little nor too much space around them. It is not a question of emptiness, but of adequate free space. There is also a quality of plainness, or perhaps an austerity reminiscent of Shaker furniture and buildings.

The subject of this piece is the god Horus represented as a falcon. Beneath him is the serpent signifying the king and, below the serpent, the façade of the royal palace. The harmonious fusion of curve and angle extends beyond the surface decoration of the shape of the stele itself.

The drawing convention which requires that certain parts of the human body be presented in profile and other parts to be presented frontally contributes compositional unity through repetition. In the "Offering Bearers" (Plate 47) simple binary rhythm is established by the figures of men walking in single file. Since all are of the same height and all move in the same direction, heads and bodies from the waist down are identical. The varied arm positions and the offerings carried contribute variety within the unity. The lower legs and feet of the men state the basic rhythm of the procession, and the animals filling the spaces between the beats embellish the fundamental rhythmic pattern with grace notes and triplets—grace notes of lambs, triplets of bulls.

So far I have dealt with individual or separate registers. Each, except for the "Stele of the Serpent King," is but one horizontal band of an entire wall composition. Plate 49 shows a larger unit—four registers and a very small portion of the fifth at the top. Reading from bottom to top: in the first register, cattle are being led through a marsh. On the left is a papyrus boat with three men; two propel the craft by oars, while the one in the center holds a rope fastened to the lead animal. On the right, a similar boat follows, and the man in its bow prods the cattle onward. In the middle are the cattle. At the bottom is a band of water with crocodile and fish; at the top is a hieroglyph inscription. The second register shows men throwing cattle for slaughter. In the third register men are portrayed carrying water to irrigate the enclosed garden on the right which other men cultivate. The fourth register depicts men transporting fowl in cages, and in the small portion of the fifth register one can see a papyrus boat beyond a row of lotus blossoms.

One may read these consecutive bands in a number of ways. First, they can be read individually and horizontally, as we read lines of type on a printed page; or, second, they can be read collectively and vertically. One can also view them as self-contained bands illustrating events separate from one another in time and space, or one can see various bands as representing action which takes place simultaneously and adjacently so that the five registers together pre-



sent a single field of action—a marsh, the high ground above the marsh, a strip of cultivated land and a path beside a canal or river.

Likewise, when considering this relief from the standpoint of art, we may either focus our attention on the small compositional units within the register or treat the various registers as parts of a total composition.\* Considering these registers as a single plastic composition, we see motif, contrast, movement and static areas cutting across the lines of the register demarcation to bring about unity and a harmonious diversity of the whole.

The lowest register, classical in its symmetry and satisfying in its balance of movement and repose, serves as an abbreviated statement of the entire relief, as well as an essential base for the registers above. Groups in the second register coincide with those below. Oblique lines of compositional thrust continue into the register beneath. The curvature of cattle horns restates the curve of the boats. The baroque movement of the second register is counterbalanced by the tense immobility of the third, and this in turn is relieved by the freer movement of the fourth. Within the strict demands of drawing convention, an amazing variety of rhythms has been achieved, ranging from balanced restraint to complex activity, from primitive rigidity to controlled fluidity. There is also throughout the four registers a continuity of triangular motif and a well-balanced distribution of decoratively rendered objects (boats, wigs, garden enclosure, water, vegetation, legs of fowl, etc.)—least where movement is greatest, most, in static areas.

As I indicated previously, these overall compositions also compose into smaller units. Plate 46, "The Hippopotamus Hunt," shows one of the units removed from the context of a total wall composition. The vertical stem of the plant is the vital center around which the composition is organized. Radiating from this point are the taut lines of ropes, harpoons, the forward weight-bearing leg of the men on either

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\* Total composition in this case means simply what has been included in the photograph. I do not speak for what extends beyond the photograph or for what has been destroyed.

side and the softer curves of boats, fish and branches and the arabesques of hippopotami heads and backs.

The central area embracing the plant and hippopotami is a composition within a composition—tight and closely knit in character. This smaller element is quite simply organized, being divided into two by the line marking the surface of the water. The bulky, weighty objects, three hippopotami, are at the bottom. The plant begins in the center at water level, and its stems fan out above the animals. Open space can be seen through the plant's foliage, and this contrasts with the density of the animals below it. The highly patterned surface of the leaves suggests a vitality and liveliness, whereas the smooth unpatterned surface of the hippopotami suggests repose and lethargy.

Although the composition is divided horizontally, its two parts are unified by the extension of the three heads above the water surface. Unity is further augmented by the fact that the frogs which cling to the plant are, plastically, little hippopotami: they have the same unpatterned surface, the same rounded outlines, and they face in the same direction as their counterparts below. The patterned surface and shape of the plant leaves are echoed in the grasshoppers. The curve of the hippopotami tongues is repeated in the lines depicting the folds of the neck skin and in the lines defining the curves of rump and belly.

Egyptian drawing as illustration is characteristically accurate. Naturalists are able to identify its flora and fauna. The plant above is *equisetum*, commonly known as horsetail. But Egyptian drawing is also characteristically distorted. In this case, there is size distortion. However, if all objects had been drawn to realistic scale, there would have been no composition, for the hippopotami would have taken up the entire wall and the plant and grasshoppers would have been so minute as to be practically invisible. Man would have been reduced from the hunter to the hunted.

**Summary.** The primary intent of the early Egyptian artist was illustration, *i.e.*, the presentation of subject facts, but because he edited his subject facts and organized them



plastically, seeking to delight the senses and to state the universality of human desires and the commonality of human experience, his art is also rich in decorativeness and expressiveness. Egyptian art, like all other art, combines the elements of illustration, decoration and expression; however, the illustrative element predominates in reliefs and tomb models, the decorative in painting and the expressive in "formal" sculpture.

The portrayal of the same aspect of the same subject over a long period of time resulted in the development of a conventionalized pictorial language. Although convention demanded conformity and imposed restraints, human nature, being what it is, triumphed over these limitations to reveal its individuality.

The great power of the Egyptian tradition arises chiefly from the simplicity of its color, line and rhythms, from the stabilized weightiness of its masses and from the symmetry of its composition. Variety comes through the contrast of opposites, which creates tension, while the fusion of contrasts resolves these tensions into a satisfying unity.

The broad human values of the tradition are grounded in two forms of human orientation: there are times when man looks out upon vast spaces of the universe and perceives that he is part of a cosmic order. Then he is most receptive to the qualities of strength, austerity, powerfulness and imperishability. But, in other moments, he shuts out the universe and moves within his narrow world of home and garden, within his particular sphere of influence, and then he is captivated by the charm of cheerfulness, naïveté, gaiety, simplicity and familiarity.

We have just reviewed sixteen centuries of Egyptian painting and sculpture. Now we might draw a diagonal line from Venice to Amsterdam and let our mind's eye sweep over the painting and sculpture that came out of this area of Western Europe in the 700 year period between Giotto and Matisse, between the sculpture of the late Gothic period and that of Brancusi. Consider the great variety of this art. Even the untutored, relatively unseeing, museum visitor will recognize that the art of the Florentine tradition differs

from that of the Venetian, that the painters of eighteenth-century France differ from those of the post-impressionistic period. And think, too, of the variety of individual styles which manifest themselves. Even in the case of artists who are of the same nationality and working at the same time, it is quite an easy matter to distinguish one from the other. One is not going to have to consult the catalogue or read the signatures to know that a Cézanne "Bathers" was not painted by the same painter as a Renoir "Bathers." One is not likely to mistake a Vermeer for a Rembrandt nor a Lancret for a Chardin.

The Egyptian tradition has not the same variety of forms and techniques. It presents no such panorama of evolution and development. It is not a visual tale founded on the rhythm of innovation and rediscovery and increasing personal expressiveness. Except we memorize the facial contours of each pharaoh or read the dates and identification provided by archeologists, we find it very difficult to know whether a given example comes from the year 2800 B.C. or the year 1800 B.C. In most cases we are not sharply aware of the individuality of the artist.

And so the question of creativity arises: how are we to evaluate the art of the Old and Middle Kingdoms in this respect? Are we to say that it is less creative because it lacks variety, because it is not expressive of the individual artist? I think not.

When we say "European tradition," we are, in reality speaking of a number of traditions, created by members of various national groups living under different geographic, climatic, political and economic conditions. These diverse peoples were, nevertheless, bound together by a commonality of cultural concepts. There was a great deal of contact among them, and, therefore, art traditions were readily disseminated, enriching one another and stimulating one another. Besides drawing upon contemporary traditions and those of the immediate past, the Europeans drew from the ancient world—Egypt, Greece and Rome—as well as from the Far East and the primitive peoples of Africa and America. The Egyptian tradition, on the other hand, was radical, primary. It seems to have been generated solely



within the Nile valley by a homogeneous people. Not only was Egypt geographically isolated, it was also culturally isolated, for, in the times of which I speak, Egyptian art was developed beyond that of other civilizations. Then, too, Egypt was not exposed to the convulsions of change which in the modern world have become commonplace: the basic manner of life and the system of values remained rather constant over this long period of time.

And, finally, we might do well to examine several prejudices from which we moderns suffer. First, we tend to place the highest value on art that records the individual experience. We have made a cult of personal expression. For the Egyptian there existed no such cult. The creativeness of the artist was gauged by the extent to which his art was expressive of the civilization to which he belonged, by how accurately it illustrated the life that that civilization knew and reflected those values which had enabled the group to pass from a primitive, chaotic state to that of complex, orderly civilization.

Secondly, we have been indoctrinated into the conviction that the passage of time brings progress in the sense of something better. Most ancient civilizations believed that mankind had been born into a golden age and had successively sunk down through the various phases—from silver to bronze to iron; that man had lost the paradise which had been his in the beginning. They believed human woes to be the result of man's departure from the ancient standards.\*

Ancient man was suspicious of novelty. He distrusted innovation. If one came upon an idea previously unknown or unexpressed, he did not take credit for it, but palmed it off as having been handed down from a more ancient source. We may condemn this resistance to change, but we ought also to realize that such resistance serves as a safeguard and as a protection for advances already made. Censure the Egyptian artist because he clung to the old traditions through so many centuries, but at the same time be grateful because he not only established a tradition, but also preserved it.

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\* We moderns differ only in the respect that we assign the Age of Gold not to antiquity, but to childhood. We differ in that we believe the cure for our woes to be reversion to childishness and primitive, uninhibited behavior.

Know the difference between a traditionalist and an academician.

Though I explain these prejudices which may stand in the way of our fullest appreciation of the creativity in Egyptian art, it actually needs no justification. This tradition is unique and individual; it stands apart from other traditions. It has its own peculiar identity, for it bears the imprint of its collective creator, and it records the experience of its creator in terms which are aesthetically and expressively meaningful to us.

But, of course, perhaps the strongest argument for this tradition's creativity lies in its eternal vitality. It has never died, for it has left behind a legacy in that it has been incorporated into and adapted by so many traditions which followed it in time. Ancient Egypt contributed the essential basis upon which later traditions built.

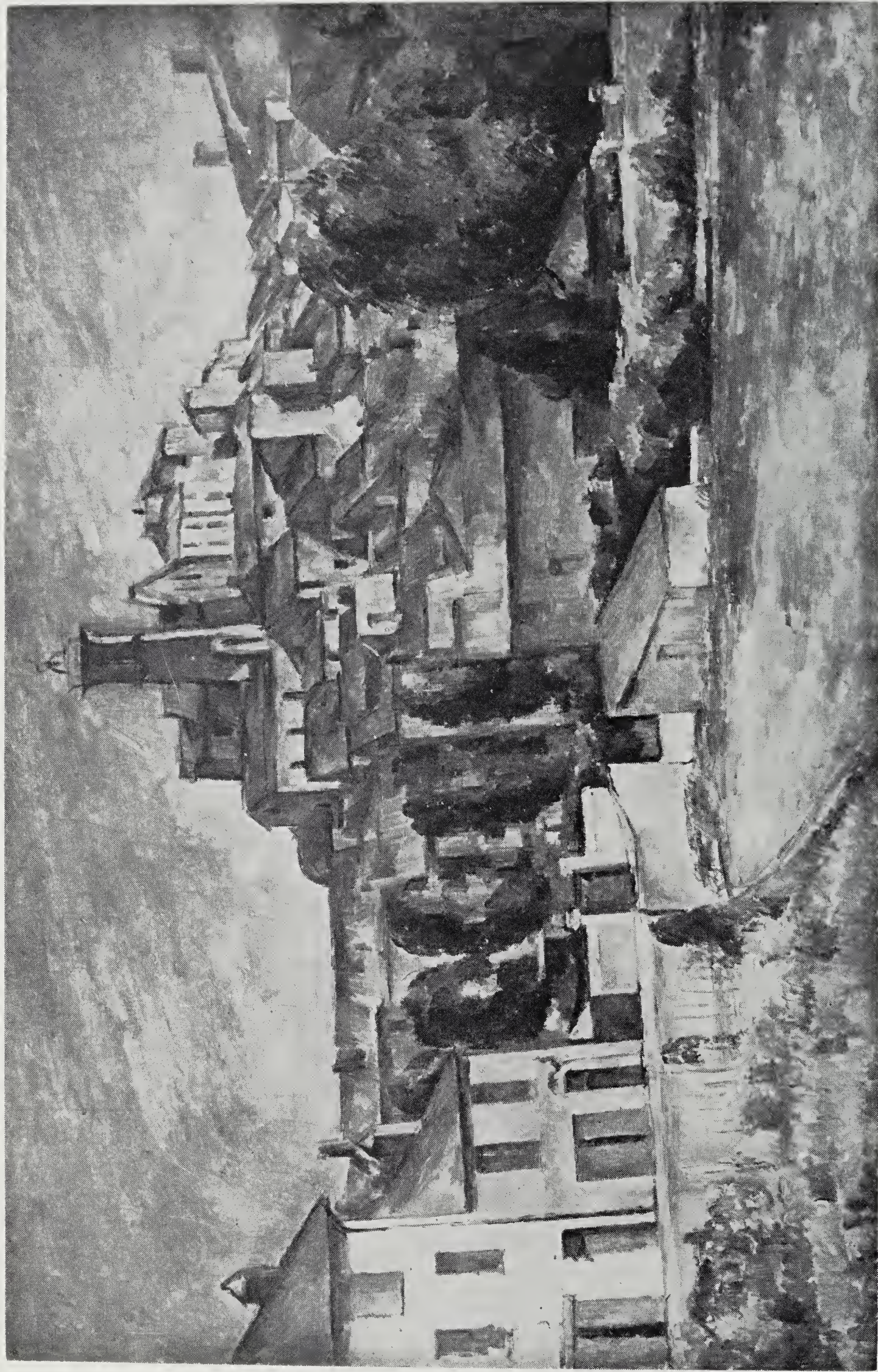


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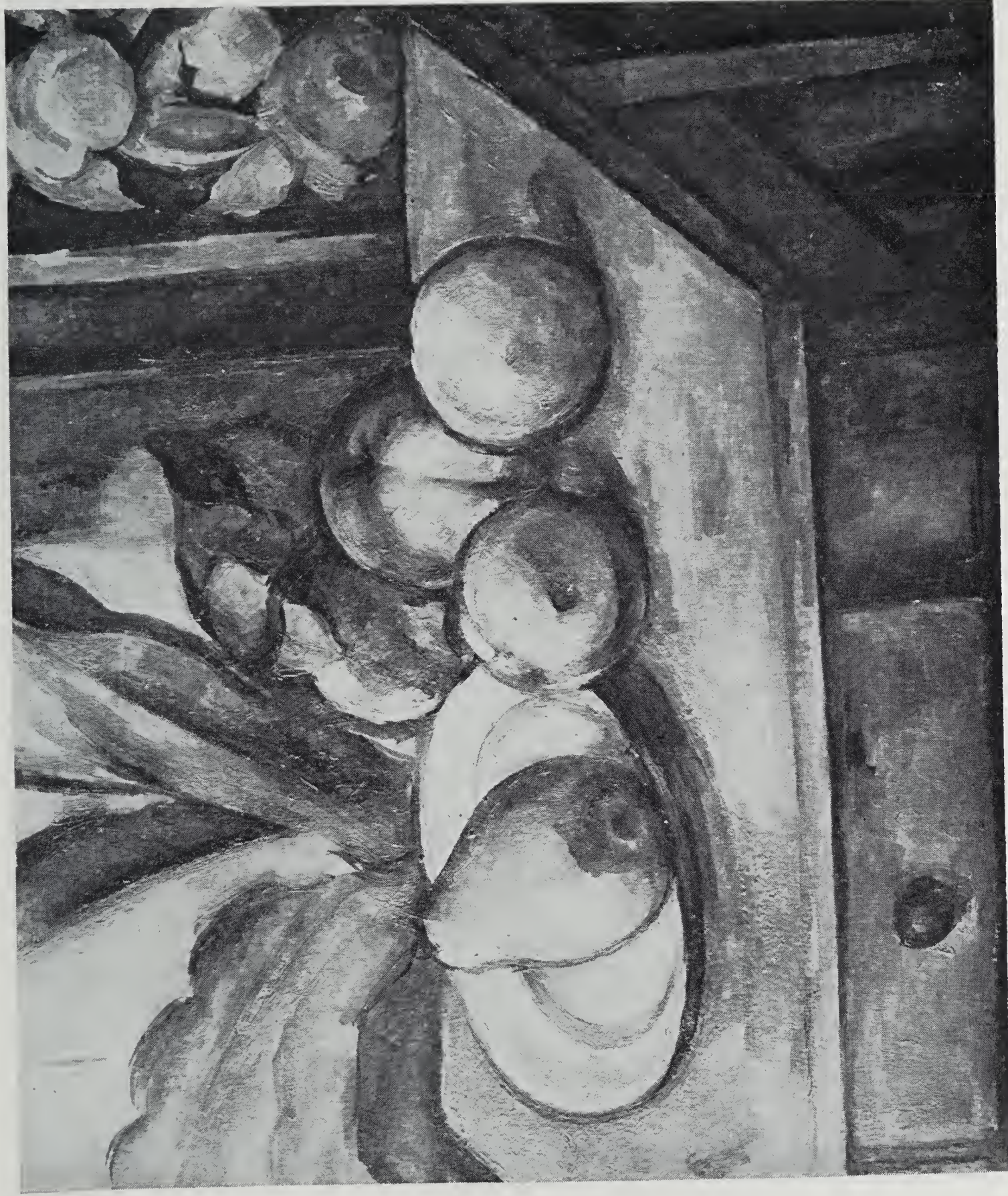
D. Teniers, the Younger

*The Archduke Leopold William Studying the Paintings in his Brussels Gallery.*  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

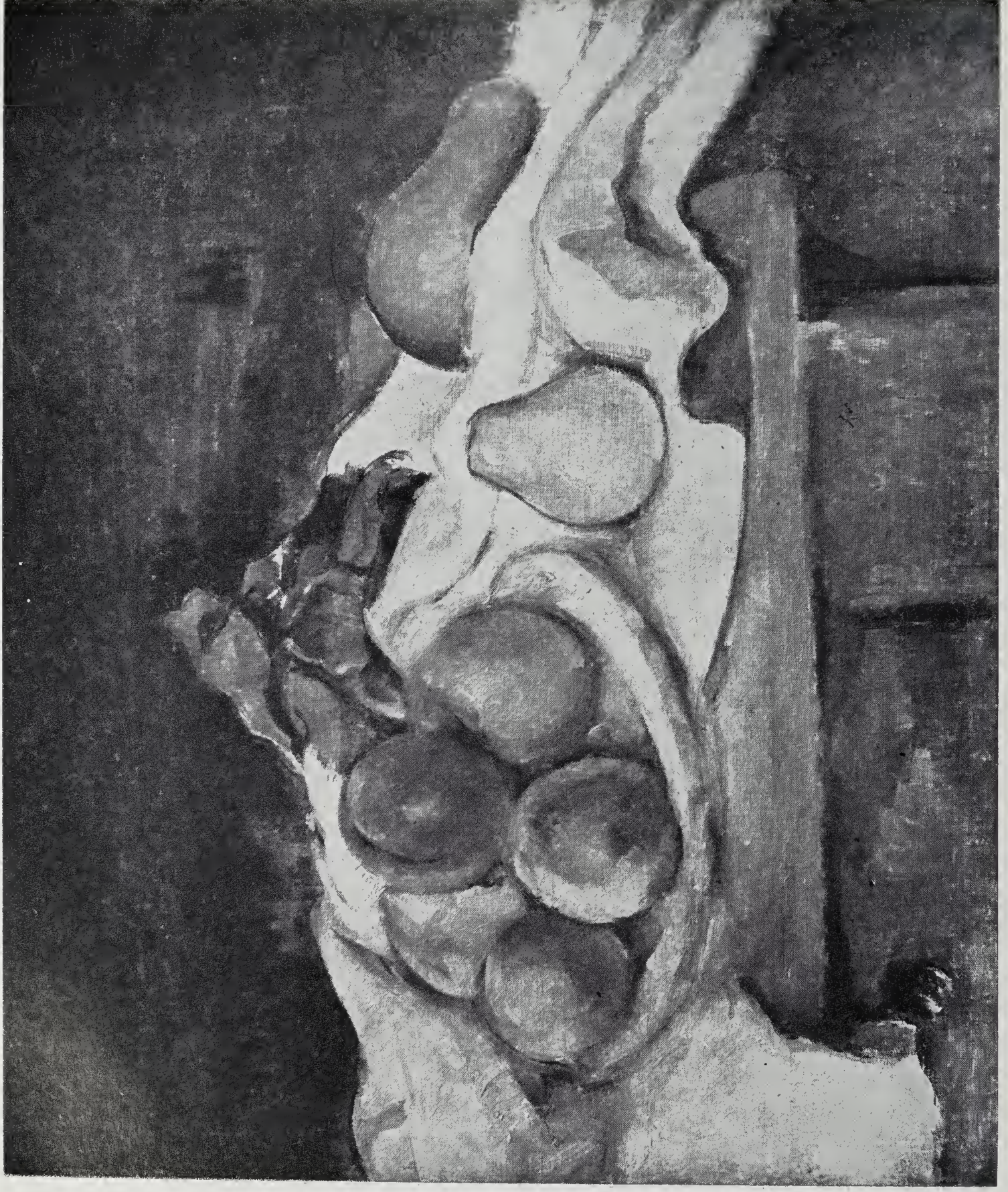




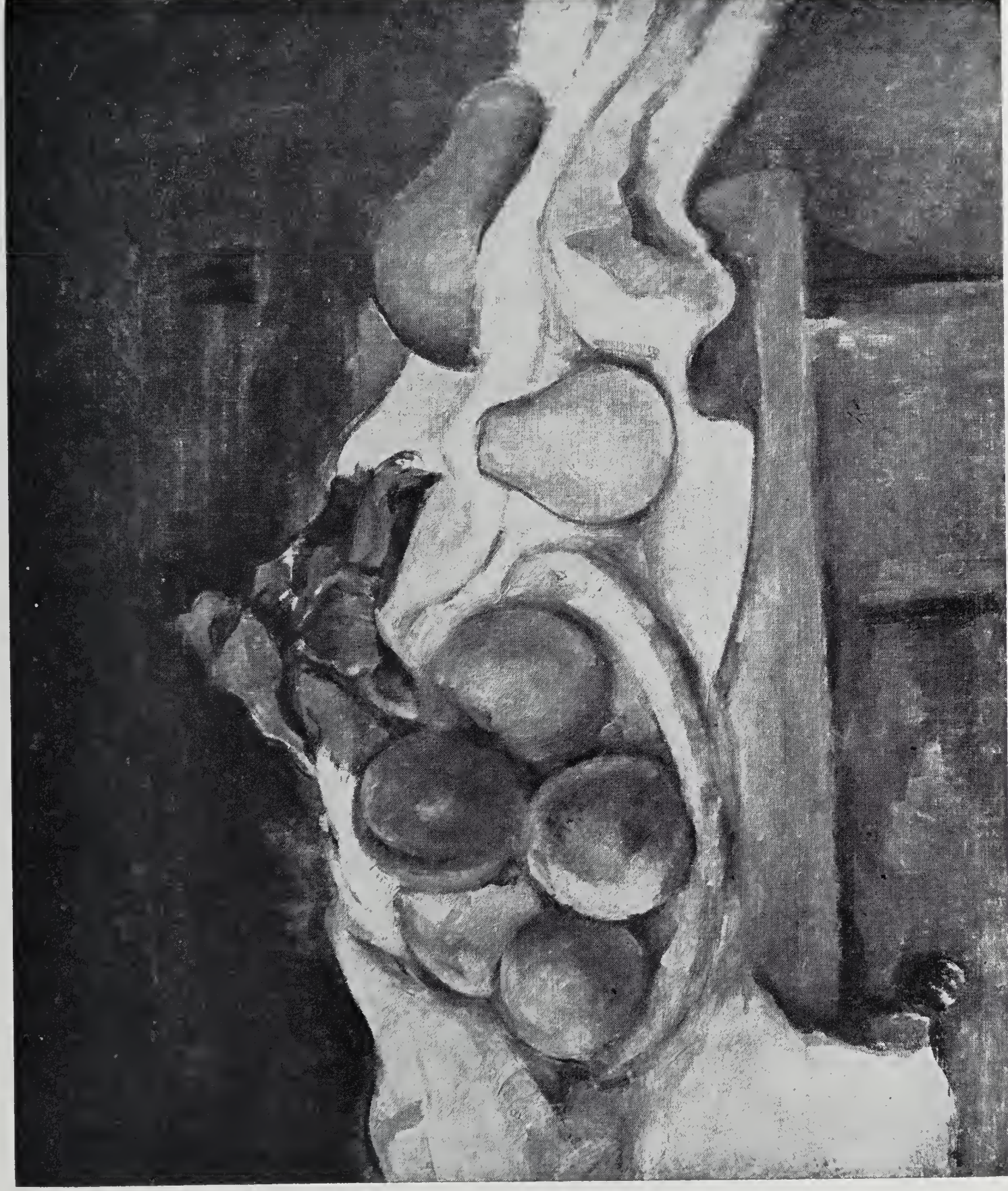








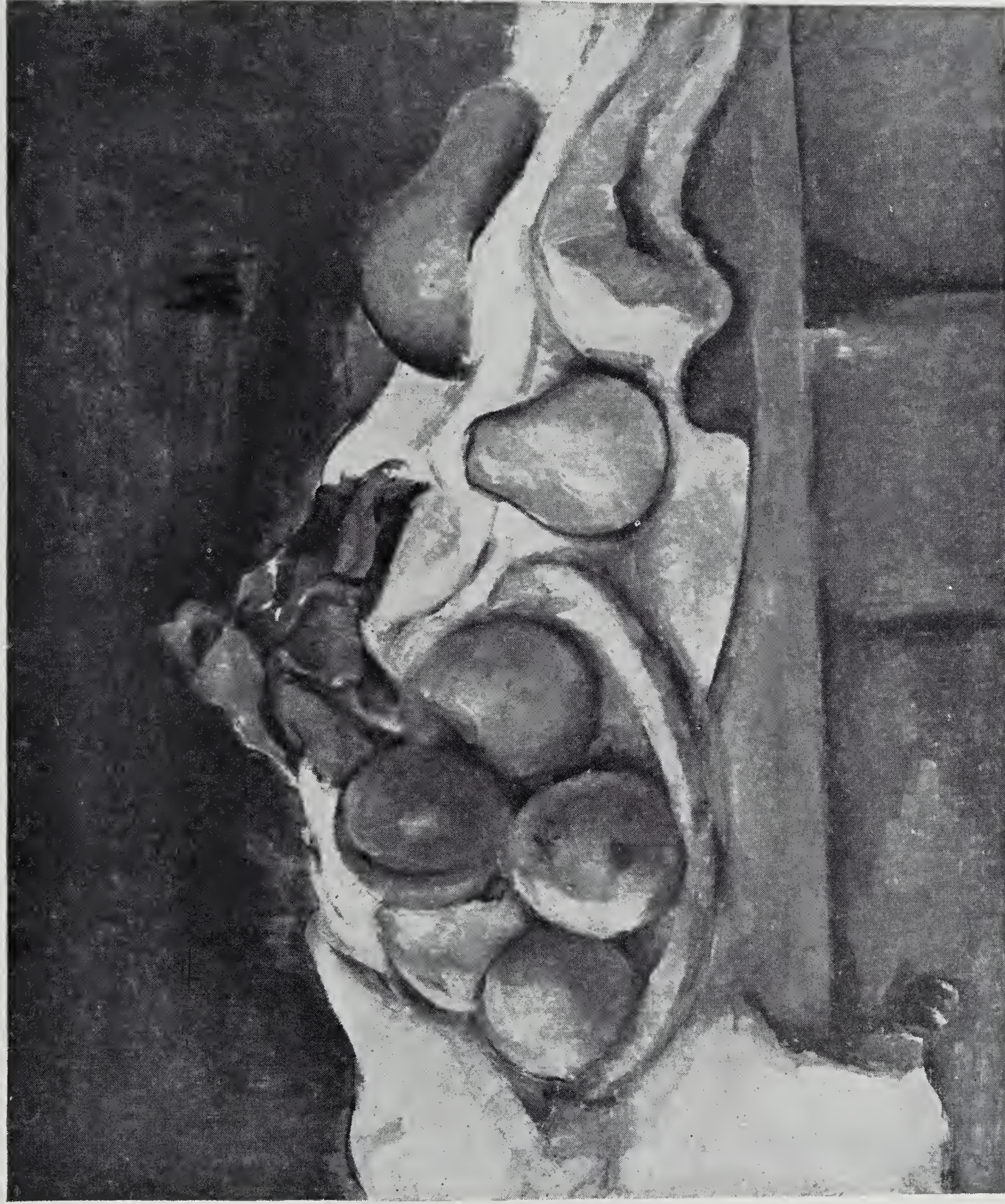












Cézanne

*Peaches and Pears*  
(Altered Photograph)







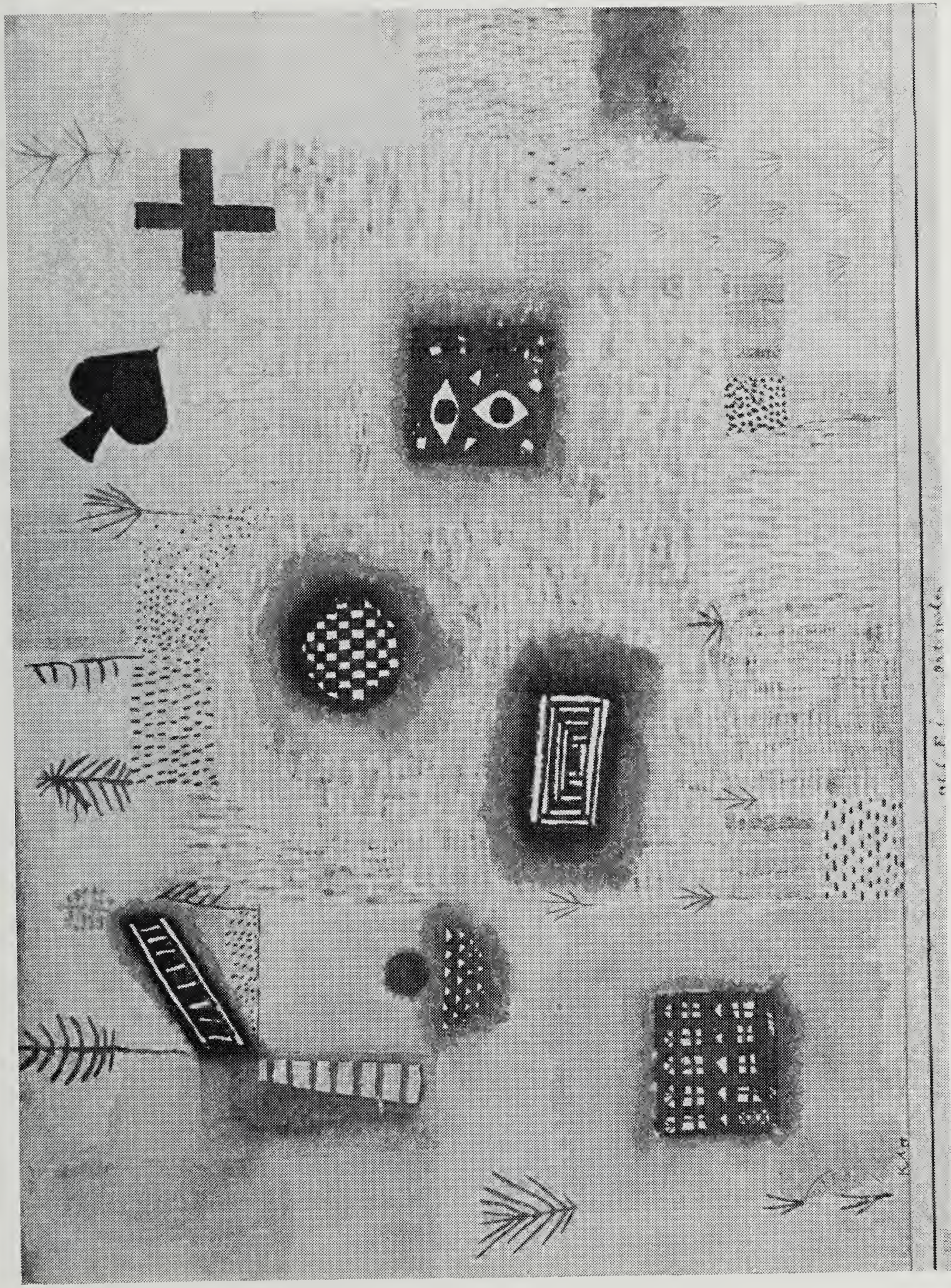




















PLATE 19



An "El Greco Wall"



FOLD-OUT



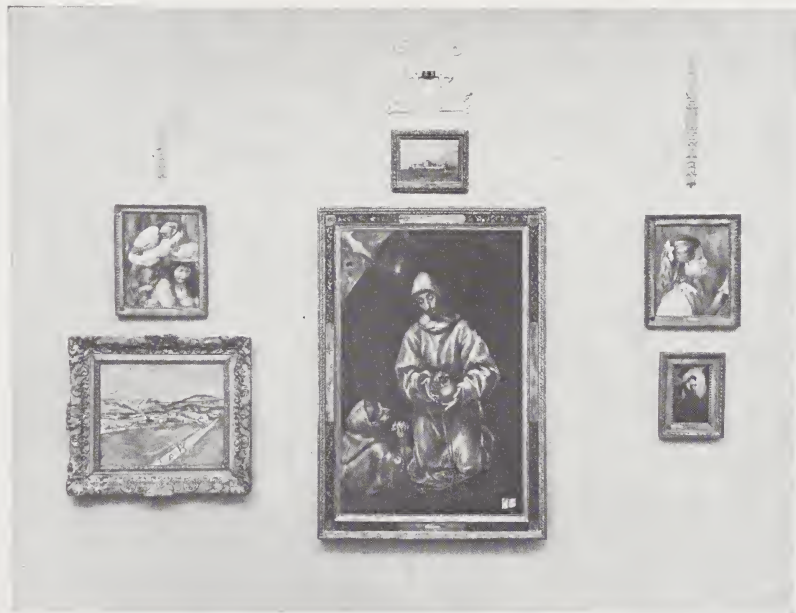






*An "El Greco Wall," with one painting missing*





*An "El Greco Wall," with substitute painting*









FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

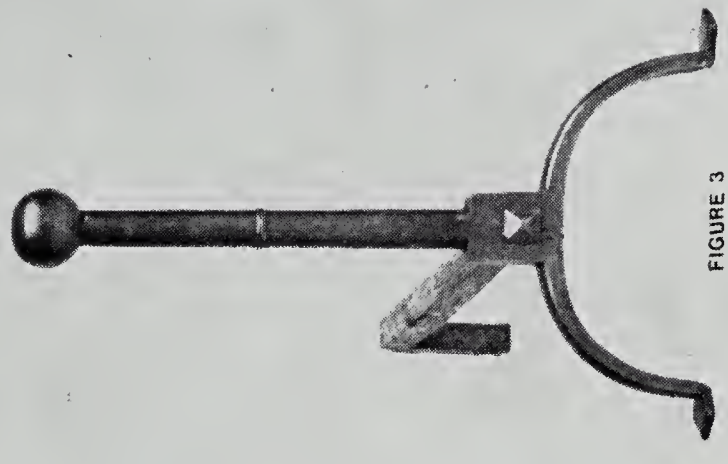


FIGURE 3





Soutine

*Baker Boy*









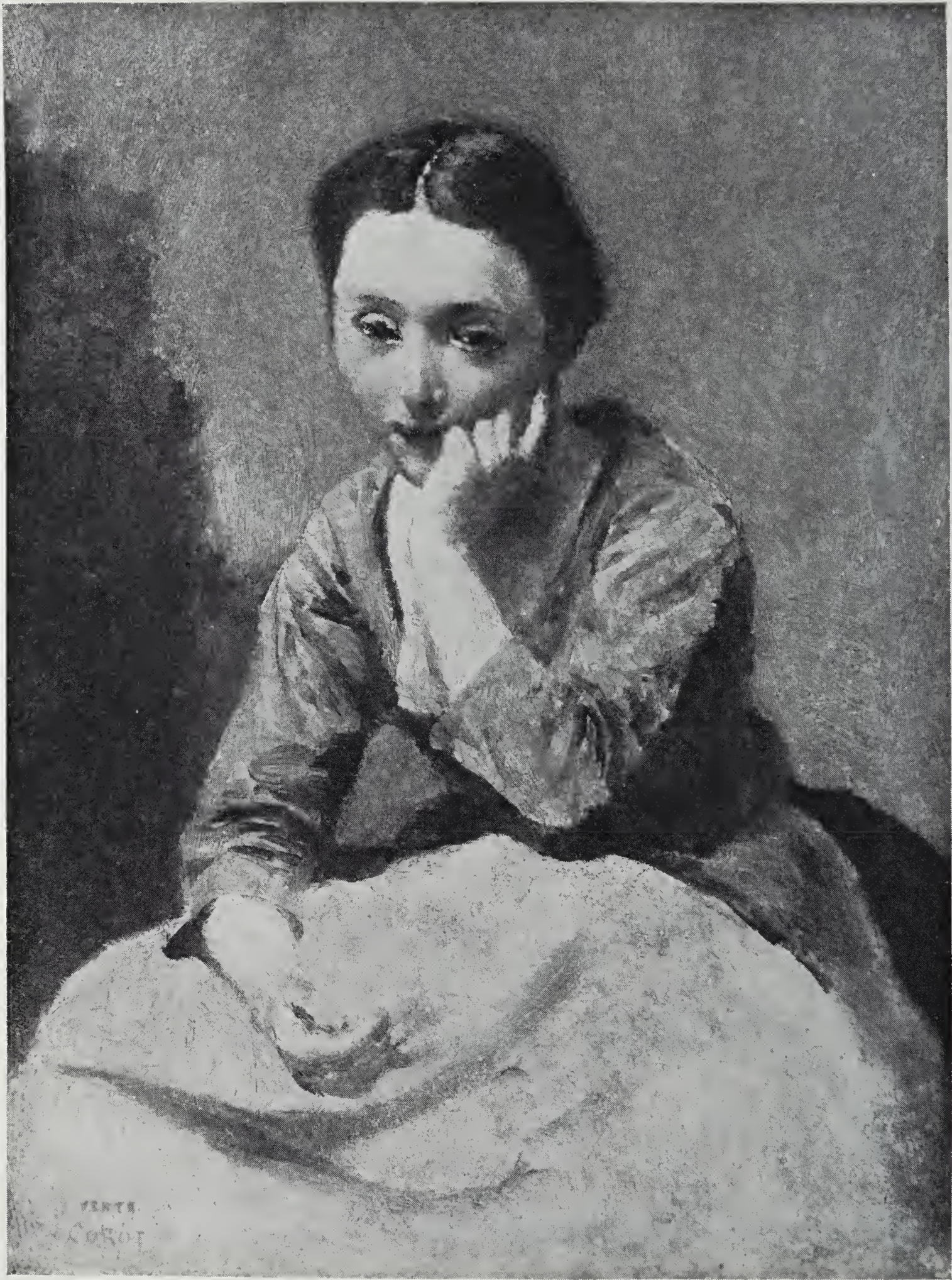
Veronese

*Baptism*









Corot

*Woman in Pink Blouse*





Renoir

*Standing Odalisque*





Renoir

*After the Bath*





Titian

*Man and Son*





Cézanne

*Fruit and Ginger Jar*

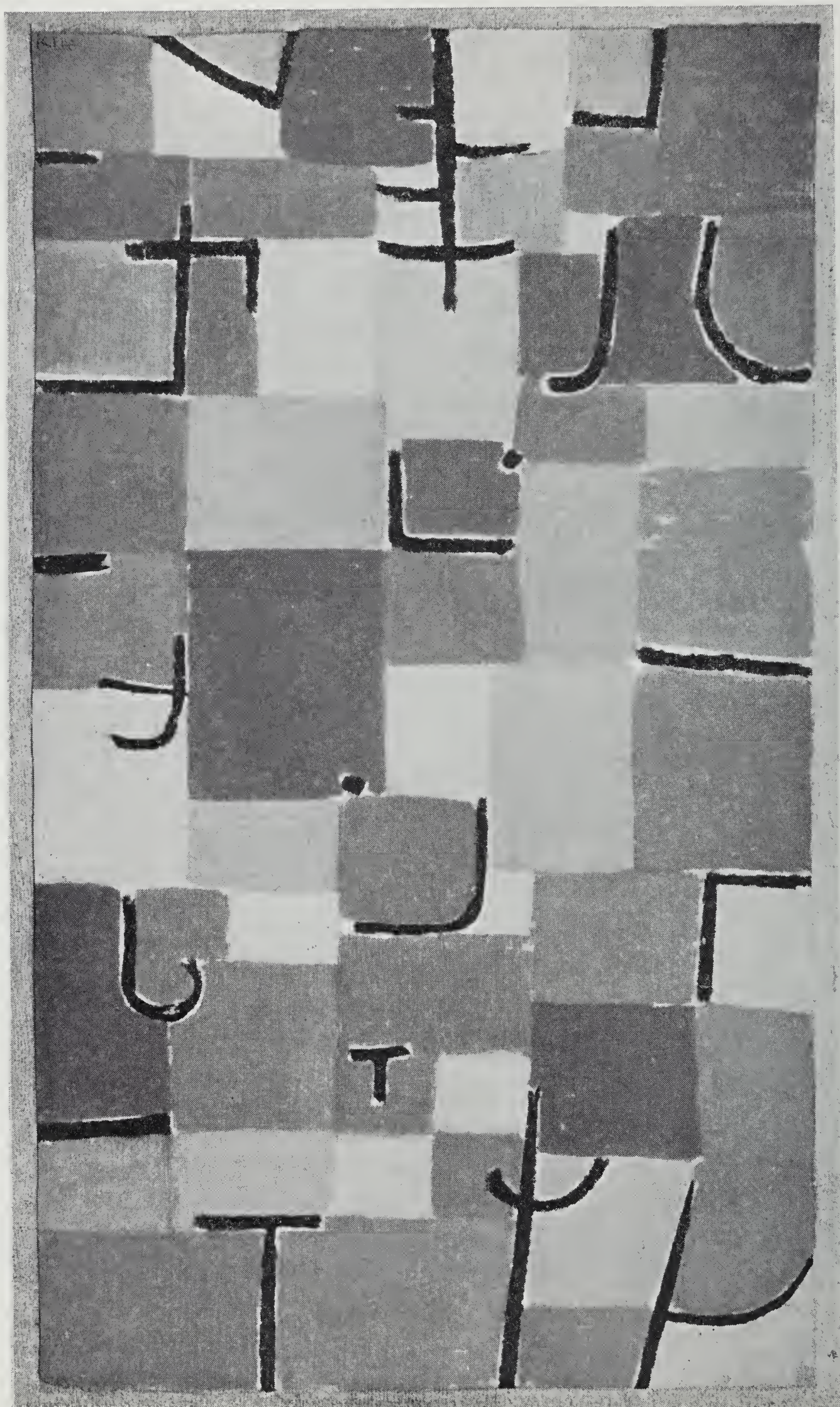




Tintoretto

*Two Prophets*





Klee

*Signs in Yellow*  
Collection of Mrs. Paul Klee, Berne  
By courtesy of Wittenborn and Company, New York





Picasso

*The Fireplace*  
Private Collection, Paris  
By courtesy of Skira Art Books, Geneva, Switzerland





Van Gogh

*Flowerpiece*





A "Titian Wall"



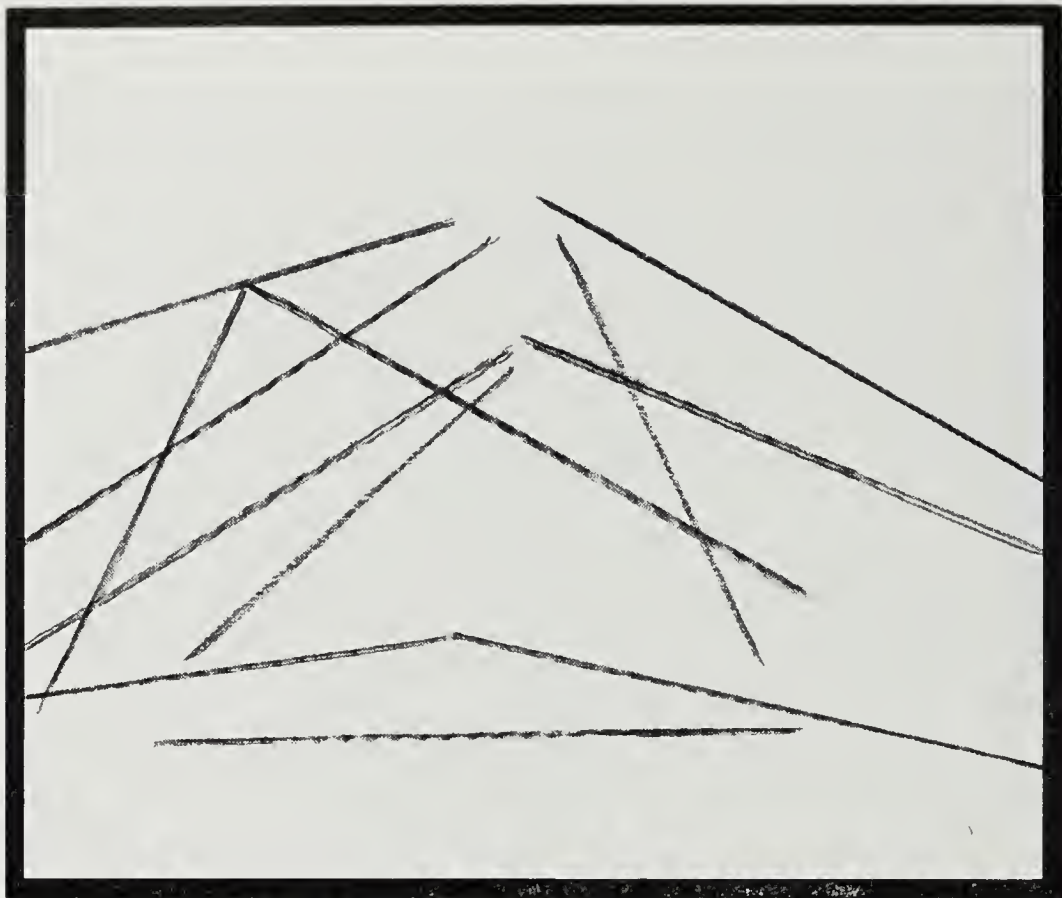


Figure 1

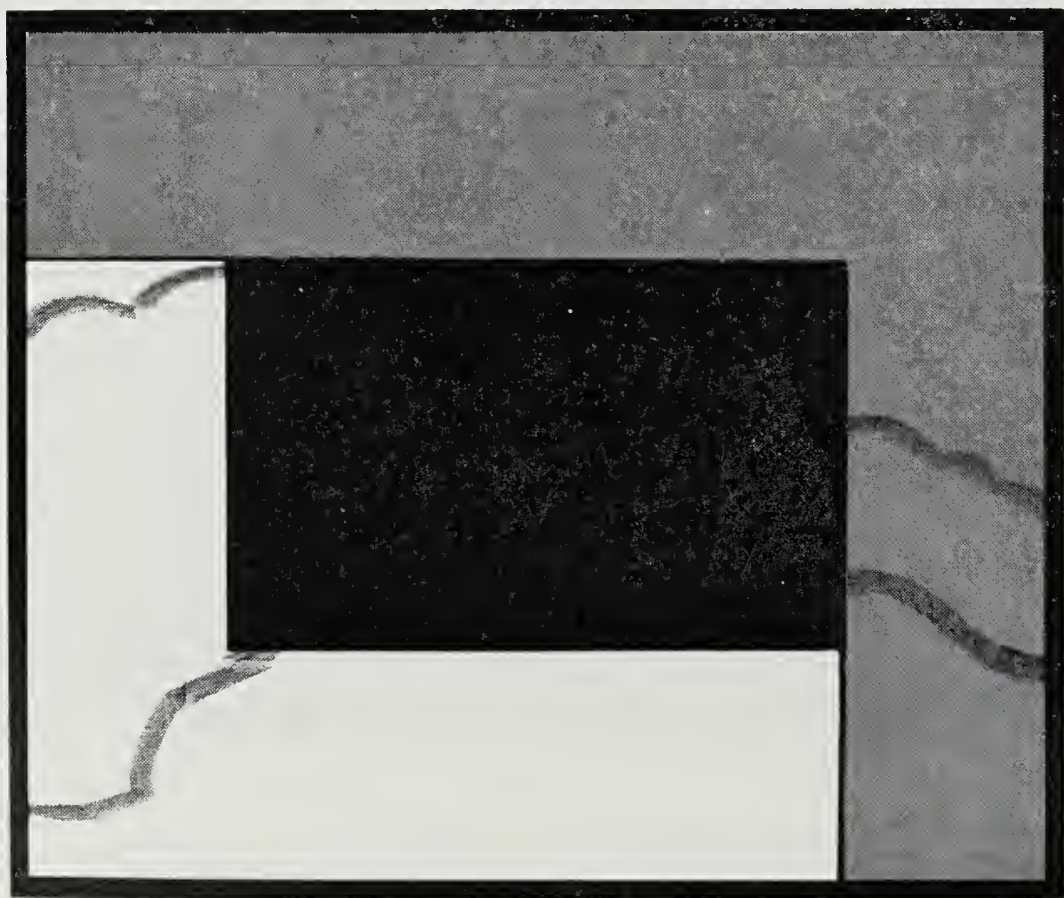
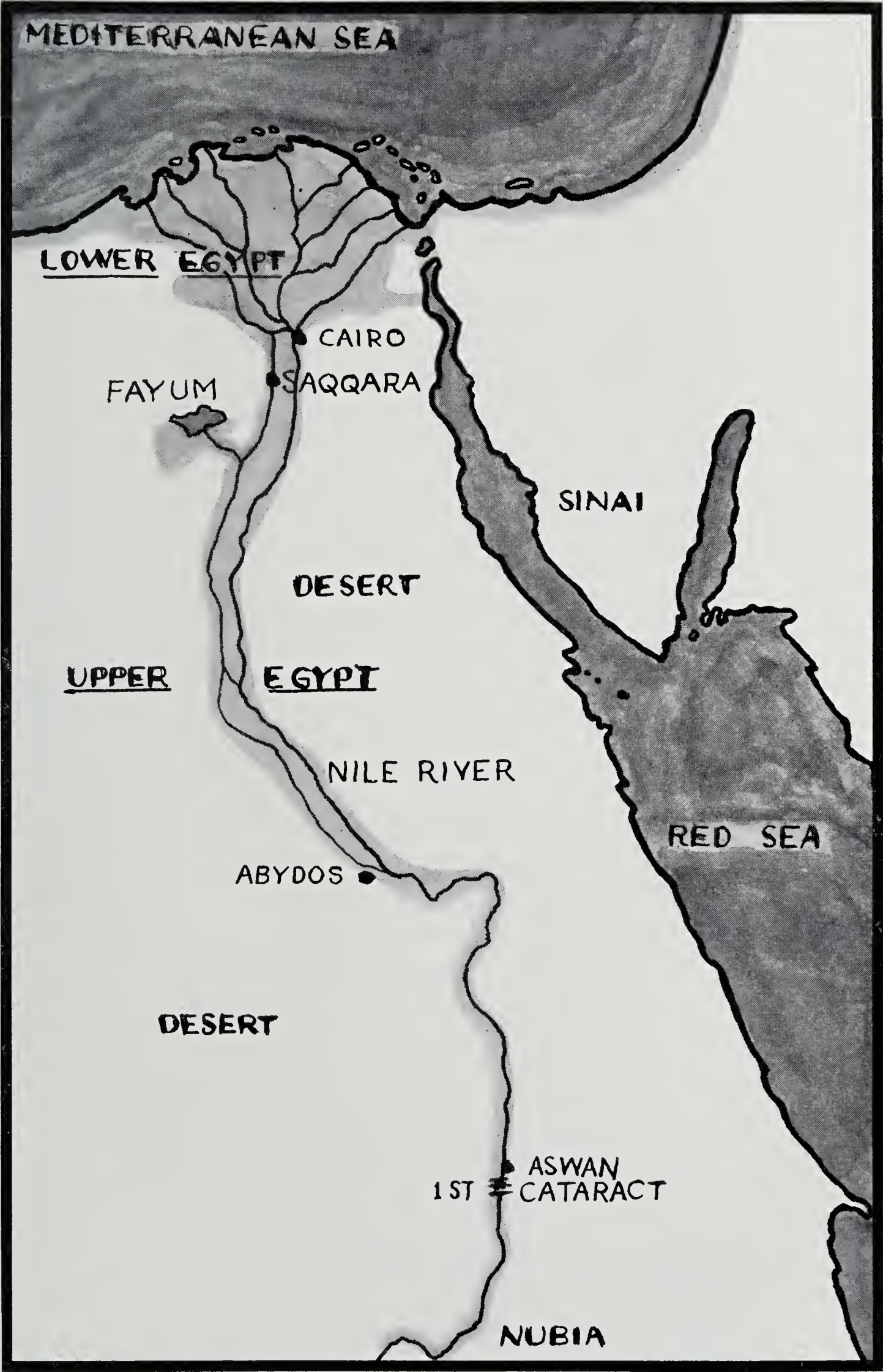


Figure 2





Map of Egypt





Egyptian—Fourth Dynasty

*King Mycerinus and his Queen*  
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





Egyptian—Old Kingdom

*Stele of the Serpent King*  
Louvre—Photograph: Musées Nationaux, Paris





Egyptian—Old Empire

*Scribe Squatting (Profile)*  
Louvre—Photograph: Musées Nationaux, Paris





Egyptian—Old Empire

*Scribe Squatting* (Front View)  
Louvre—Photograph: Musées Nationaux, Paris





Egyptian—Second Dynasty

*Palette of King Narmer (Recto)*  
Cairo Museum

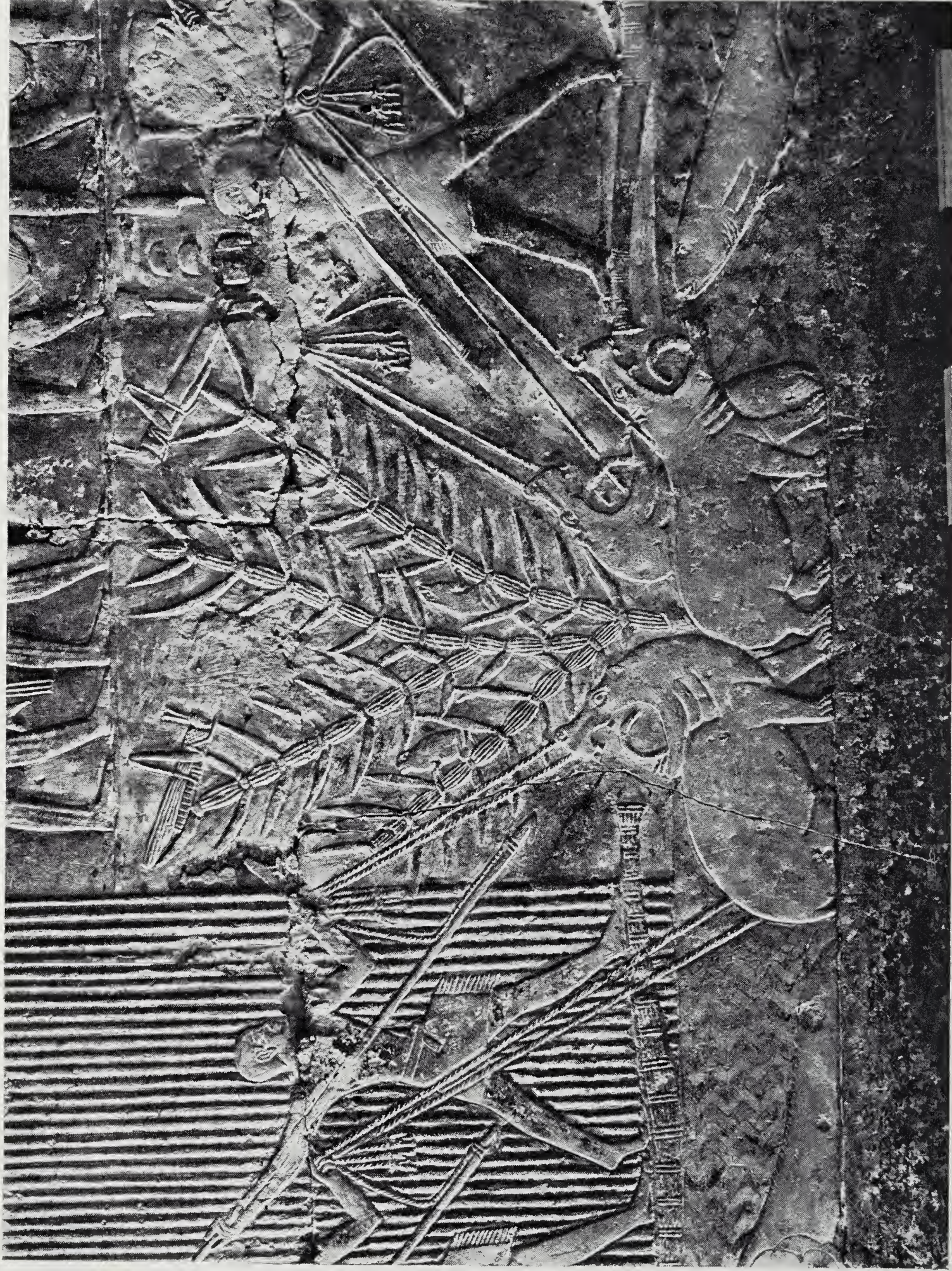




Egyptian—Second Dynasty

*Palette of King Narmer (Verso)*  
Cairo Museum





Saqqara, Egypt

*Hippopotamus Hunt* (Mastaba of Mereruka)  
Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago





Saqqara, Egypt

*Offering Bearers* (Mastaba of Mereruka)  
Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago





Saqqara, Egypt

*Hunt* (Mastaba of Mereruka)  
Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago





Saqqara, Egypt

*Agricultural Activities (Mastaba of Mereruka)*  
Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago





Egyptian—Old Kingdom

*Woman Grinding Grain*  
Soprintendenza Alle Antichità—Florence





Egyptian—Twelfth Dynasty

*Dancing Pygmy*  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Museum Excavations, 1933—Rogers Fund, 1934



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